Maurice Capitanchik

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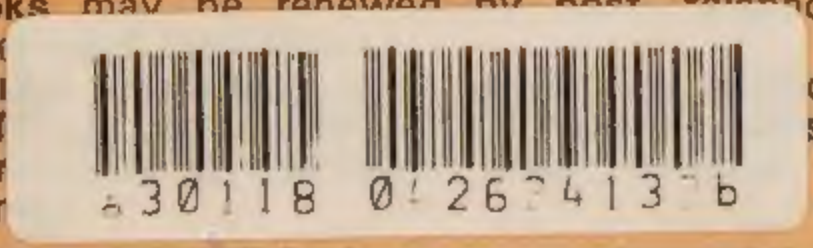

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FRIENDS AND LOVERS

To Valerie

Friends and Lovers

MAURICE CAPITANCHIK

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BOOK ONE

CHAPTER ONE

At sixteen, most boys are beginning to assert themselves, they are already competitive, anxious about the future, longing to prove their worth, but I fell in love. It was not to be the love of my life, but the beginning of a dilemma which almost cost me my sanity. All that is over, I look out now across these hills, at the trees that sweep towards the sea, and I am at peace.

I do not regret anything, except for all of us, that we should not be allowed, or allow others or ourselves, to live openly and freely according to our natures, to live spontaneously, as only man is able, and as only he refuses to do. Now that I have what I want, it is to this end I wish to live.

My mother, who brought me up, considered that I was a 'good' child, by which she meant that I did as she required, caused her no difficulty and was docile, and quiet. Not to cause trouble is often almost the essence of what is called 'goodness' in a person, but it is sometimes not at all the essence of that person's nature; inwardly, he may long for something entirely different, turbulence, or strife, or in my case, a radiance of feeling which would surpass all the dimness of everyday. She guessed at what was hidden beneath my surface, and that may have been one reason why she bound me to her from the beginning, that I should not seek joy or sorrow, or any expression of my nature, away from her, for I was all she had. She did not succeed, or I should have had a living death, but she laid the foundations for a strange life.

I do not blame her, for she herself was strange, and beautiful. She was one of those people who live their entire adult existence centred round one crucial experience, which, even when it is long past, still has, for them, all its original freshness and force of emotion. In her case, it was her love for my father, whom I have never seen. She was an actress, who had an affair with the leading man of the play in which she had a small part. As a result, I was born, and my father bought her a house, then disappeared, and we never heard of him again.

As I remember, there was a darkness in that house, both

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actual and as a quality of feeling. The curtains were always drawn, we lived by candlelight, lamplight, anything but the sun, because my mother was a passionate worshipper of her own past, she wished to obliterate the present in order to remember and dwell on those memories which had made up the whole of her real, her meaningful life. She was the devotee of a vanished idol.

And to me she was a goddess, with light hair, delicate features, and the tragic smile of the betrayed. But she did not see herself in that light. She felt that she had been blessed by the brief contact with the man whose seed I was. She told me many times of his great physical beauty, his marvellous presence on the stage, and that I resembled him in face and body. She told me that she had been really alive only during the time of their affair, that she had been happy to be pregnant, that she was content to have the remainder of her days to re-live those moments which were infinitely sweet, when she had been enveloped in the poetry of life which normally we are unaware of or can just sense on the fringes of consciousness. When she told me of these things, I hated him, for whereas I was obliged by something in her and in me, and perhaps in nature, to look away from her for my spiritual sustenance, she had drawn it from him as I wished to draw it from her, and the one thing for which I longed was forever denied me.

Then, I thought her life a sacrifice, and I thought him base. Now I know that I was wrong, her life was not a sacrifice, it was an image, all she needed for completion was his presence, which, as he had not chosen to give it to her, she would not regret the absence of but still be happy in his choice. Whatever he did or had done, as he had chosen, in her eyes he was right; it was I she doubted, or rather, as I could not appear to choose other than herself, she could not believe in me. And as she believed that she was happy, I realise now that he had given her something fine.

We were poor, for we lived by taking lodgers, whom my mother could not manage, and they often ran away, owing rent, or even having stolen. Sometimes she would say to me:

'Run to the grocer, Joseph, and tell him we'll pay the bill as soon as we can.'

I hated these errands, they were a burden to me, but she needed me to do them, and as soon as I was old enough, I

became the one to collect the rents and listen to complaints. Yet my mother did not really have confidence in me, would not trust me to life. She was always afraid that, if I went out, I would not return home safely, she discouraged me from bringing other children to the house, and kept me as near to her as possible. I adored her and feared her, she was remote and untouchable like a remote cold sun, which illumined without giving warmth, for her love was reserved for the past, which she constantly re-lived in her mind with both the vividness of actuality and the purity of dreams. She stifled me, I longed to get away, and yet I was bound to my deity as though by some literal tie, and I was aware only of her, and of a great burden.

I had no friends, most of the other boys at school avoided me, and I knew that I was different to them. I was strong but fastidious, and found the grubbiness of life, the commonness of people, offensive, and they, for the most part, were crude, nosy and without sensibility. They knew what I felt, as the young do, and they would have tormented me for it had I been frail. With the exception, that is, of Ted. We had been in the same class for a month, without speaking, but I noticed that, when he thought I was not looking, he would steal tender, dreamy, admiring glances.

One day we were having a shower after games, we were the last ones left, the others had all gone. He had his back to me and I was fascinated by the slenderness and delicacy of his body, and in particular, the dimple in the side of his buttock. Half-consciously I reached out and touched it; he shivered right through his frame, turned and saw it was me, and smiled. That smile was the beginning of bliss. We stood there still and silent and looked at each other. Neither of us could have named our feeling but we had fallen in love. I touched his stomach, and once again he shivered all over, then he said :

'We'd better dress. Walk home with me.'

As we walked, we talked to each other about ourselves. He told me of his parents, his interest in art, his travels, for he had been abroad several times. I told him of my life with my mother, and I may have elaborated a little because I wanted to seem interesting, someone he would wish to know. Then, it seemed as though we talked a great deal, for the flood-gates had opened, we had found each other, but now I feel that the stories of our lives, young and un-

formed as we were, could have taken only a little telling. When we reached his home, a large house on the other side of the district where my mother and I had our house, he asked me in, but I excused myself, for my mother would be expecting me, and left him.

I was overjoyed to have found a friend, but I was also apprehensive, because I realised that I wanted more than friendship, I wanted love. I had only the vaguest idea of what this love would be, but I knew that it would be something to make my present existence seem not worth the leading. We had fallen in love without understanding what it was, and because of the newness of both love and friendship I confused them, and I felt that Ted must be someone extraordinary, which, compared to other people, he was. When I got home, my mother noticed at once that I was unusually happy, and asked me what had happened, but I did not tell her, I wanted to keep Ted to myself. After this, we talked when we could, and he often asked me to visit his house. Intuitively, I felt that to go home with him would make some great change in my life, and I hesitated. But whenever we played games, the sight of his naked body in the shower, and once or twice the slightest contact with his flesh, almost overcame me, and I decided that I could not do other than allow our relation to develop.

One day, telling my mother I should be late home from school, I persuaded her to go out by herself, and I went home with Ted. His parents were out and we were alone in the large, half-empty house. He had several rooms for himself and a lot of possessions. He showed me his books, his toys, his collection of old costumes. We spent a strange silent hour dressing each other as cavaliers, and then I said to him:

'These things are beautiful, but we don't need clothes.'

He looked at me, and then, without needing to say anything, we removed the silks and laces, and crept into his bed.

We had to discover each other as all innocent lovers do but our instinct led us on and we were transported. I had to leave him after all too short a time, and we swore to be friends for ever.

That night, lying in bed, I thought over this extraordinary, inevitable event. I had lost my innocence, my loneliness, my unity with my mother, at one stroke. I was no longer as jealous of my mother and father because now I

had Ted. I could understand, or so I thought, what they had felt, and I was glad that my mother had known such beauty, and also that I had not had to betray her with another woman in order to experience this feeling. I had heard the word, 'homosexual' and I supposed that that was what I was, but although it was something secret, as any love would have been for me, it was not something strange or distasteful, because it was love, I already knew that I could love and that this was love, and it was like something familiar which I had lost and then found. The physical facts, about which I had been vague until then, did not impress me as much as the images which seemed to come from remote distances into my mind, images of far and exotic things, the sensation of peace and harmony, and the power of my physical being as my body acted on Ted's.

I had never before had a great secret from my mother, and this was something she could never know. Although I now had a friend, my first friend, with whom I was sharing the most awful and wonderful experiences, I was thrust into a frightening anxiety because, for the first time, I was alienated from the woman who bore me. I wanted her to know and love Ted too, and for him to know and love her, but by instinct I knew that I must never try to bring this about. Until I met Ted, my life had been only the fragments of my mother's dream, which I had embodied or caught hold of, but after this time I had a life of my own. My mother realised this, although she did not know what it was, and she asked me whether I had found a girl-friend, but I denied it, and I was never to bring Ted to our house.

Although I was anxious I also felt happy, because I was alive. I had been born from my mother's womb but not from her grasp, and now the barrier had broken, my feelings flooded out towards Ted, and at that moment I would have risked all, dared all, for him, for our love, for my awareness. But in the morning I realised that we were obliged to be extraordinarily careful, and, in public, we always were.

The time I spent with Ted had to be stolen from the time I would formerly have spent with my mother, or in doing things for her. I tried to give the impression that I simply wanted to be off on my own, but she did not really accept this, she seemed so bereft that I felt almost criminal, but Ted became as much to me as she was, and I had to have them both.

'Leaving me alone again,' she would complain. 'You don't love your mother any more. Have I grown ugly, then?'

'You're lovely, mother. I'm just going for a walk,' I would lie.

'But it's cold, where is your scarf, take your scarf.'

'I don't want it.'

'Stay here with me. Joseph. Mr. Smith on the top floor, needs a washer on his tap, you will have to do it.'

'Later, mother.' And I ran off before she could make me stay.

It was Ted who first encouraged me to write. I spent what time I could at his house, and one evening he showed me some poems he had written and asked me if I wrote. I said yes, although I never had, and that night before I went to sleep I composed a verse for the first time. Ted was enchanted with it, perhaps a little because it was about and to him, and prophesied I should become a writer. From that time onwards I wrote whenever the fancy took me, and we compared and criticised each other's work.

Although Ted's parents were not poor, they made him earn his pocket money and save most of what he earned. We decided we should both deliver newspapers in the mornings to earn money to go to the country together. I loved the early mornings. Sometimes, before dawn, the sky was like black velvet. We had a steaming mug of cocoa each before setting off, and we flew through the deserted streets like arabs of the desert.

My mother made no objection to the newspapers, but I did not want to tell her of our plan to go to the country. I had never been away from her before, and whereas it might be normal for a boy to say:

'Mother, I'm going to the country with my friend, with the money I have earned,' neither of my relationships was normal, and I felt that the simple words would have been a lie, as well as hurtful to her. I wanted to say:

'I am going with my lover to the country, to make love to him close to the earth, and I would have wished for this closeness with you, but that is impossible.'

And this could never be said, but I felt that she would know it, and be afraid, and turn my joy to dust. So I said, hating the lie:

'There's a school outing, may I go?' for I knew she was not curious, and to my surprise, she said simply:

'Yes.'

She must have come to some decision, some agreement with herself, for she never questioned me again, but while I was relieved to have the freedom, and felt greatly blessed in it, I felt even more guilty towards her, the poor deserted one, and tried to make up to her for it.

Of the journey to the country I remember clearly only the smell of the barn in which we spent a night, for although strange to think of now I had never been to the country before, that rich smell of rotting matter which made me feel washed clean in the earth, and the great joy of our bodies in each other's arms. The richness of colour, the pungency and freshness of smell, the sight of horses and sheep, and above all the great trees, were a revelation to me, and Ted, who had been to many places, laughed at my naïveté. For the first time, I was free, and all this became part of our lovemaking, we re-created it in our caresses, and it was, until then, the most joyful time of my life.

For the first and only time Ted told me he loved me, and that we should always stay together, but I knew, and perhaps had always known, that eventually we must part, and sometimes I could not help from crying about it, for Ted was my first and only friend. I realised that there was something limited in him. It was not his intelligence, which was vivid, but it affected his intelligence, and whereas I wished my life to be infinite, he wished, ultimately, for a security of tenure on the earth, such as could be combined with his nature and proclivities. Later, I was to feel we had changed positions, that it was I who wanted security, but I was wrong, it was stability I sought, and that is a different order of feeling.

When we got home, we both wrote essays, separately, on our experience, and compared them. Mine was a poem to night, to nature, to the feel of a lover's flesh. His was a description of the fields of spring.

Ted could draw quite well, and because of his interest in collecting clothes had become something of an expert on dress, and he told me he wanted to become a designer. I had no interest in work other than writing. I thought I should manage to get by until I could earn my living by my pen, and gradually I dropped out of that competition for place, for attainment, for brilliance in examination, which is really an artificially arranged rehearsal of a battle for sub-

sistence and is the life of almost every intelligent pupil My mother was worried about me, but she left me to tackle my life by myself, and whereas Ted was broken-hearted when the time came for him to leave for college and for me to leave school, I had the calm which came from having expected just this.

Ted said he would write, and made me promise that I would write to him. I did so for a time, until he told me he had found someone else, which was what I had been waiting to hear, and from then I gradually ceased to keep in contact with him.

I knew what I should do I toured the art schools and got work as a model. I had not liked school, and I did not particularly like the idea of working indefinitely in such places now, but I had faith in my star, that I would soon be relieved of my drudgery, and it had the advantage that I would be able to work irregular hours and give the maximum time to my writing.

A school, like all organisations, has its hierarchy, and despite its avowed purposes exists to a large extent for the convenience of those at the top of the pyramid. At my school, I had been aware only of masters and pupils, there was little personal contact and no equality between either group, the pupils were tolerated if mediocre or worse and used as examples if exceptional. I had assumed a mask of indifference to my surroundings to protect my private life with Ted and to hide my fear of authority. But at all the schools in which I worked I was, in reality, little more than a living shape of flesh which was required to remain inhumanly passive for long periods. I had lost caste from being a pupil, and the professors, however strange or eccentric or humorous, were the powers around which their world revolved, a world in which I was merely a necessary thing.

Usually the school would have a porter, perhaps an old soldier who, when I inquired for work, would send me along a corridor filled with plaster casts and pieces of unfinished sculpture, to knock on a door, and wait. Eventually, a dusty, ageing man, bespectacled, preoccupied, would emerge, and when I told him what I wanted, stare at me, ask me to remove my clothes, then say: 'You'll do,' that was all. I felt as though I was having to do, not with art, but with business, that these people were in business, and

not part of the most difficult life that men can lead, that of artists. I imagined that Rembrandt, when approached by someone for work as a model, or noticing a particular person in the street, was reminded by the man of St. Paul, or saw him as the St. Paul of the picture he wished to paint, but there was no concept or vision in the eyes of these teachers, I could read their thoughts, which ran :

'He may prove interesting for the life class and I was wondering who to give them. Yes, I will fit him in.'

And I supposed that that was why they taught, and did not practise, art.

I possessed an unusually good physique for a model, and although I found the work tiring to the point of exhaustion I had the capacity to remain still, and so I was in demand. At first, I stood before the class of young men and women, aware only of my nakedness. I wore a tiny slip to cover my genitals but nonetheless I felt as though every secret of my body were visible, that they could see I had been Ted's lover, and every impulse my flesh which was provoked by my nakedness and which I was obliged to suppress. I was surprised when I was told I was a good model, for I felt stiff and awkward, my legs often trembled and I sometimes found myself falling forward as I momentarily dropped off to sleep. Once or twice, young men asked me to pose privately for them. I knew this was always an overture, and I refused, except on one occasion, when I accepted out of curiosity. The place where he lived was an exotic hothouse of a flat; he affected a silver-topped cane, wore a fin-de-siècle tie, and I feared the worst. He asked me to stand quite naked and spent most of an hour staring at me. How I longed for Ted then! Had it been his look, as he had first gazed at me, I would have given myself as I did that day, but this young man, aesthetic and trite, had not the power to move me and I remained indifferent.

I pondered this experience. I had all kinds of sexual impulses, as most people do, and was often consumed with desire, but I could not respond physically unless it was to the self of the person who provoked the response, and the only such person had been Ted. I did not think I was strange for having loved a boy, but for being so entirely exclusive, and I wondered about what kind of person I might be. Shortly after this, I noticed a new girl in one of the classes for which I worked. I had never taken notice of the girls before, they had

not interested me, but she was different. She had straight fair hair and a face like certain angels by Della Robbia; the flat, broad nose and sensual mouth of one of those angelicised peasants, a sculptor's face. I wanted to get to know her but I could not think how. I was normally too shy to speak to girls and in this case it was especially difficult because, while the male or homosexual students sometimes slept with models, the girl students almost never spoke to the models at all. But one day there were just one or two students in the class and the professor was away. I plucked up courage to ask Anna. I had discovered her name. How she would like me to pose, and we began to speak. Half-an-hour later, we were the only people in the room, and she let me walk her home when the class over.

She was a strange girl. I felt as though she accepted me as though she knew me, or rather, as though she had always known me. She asked me in to her basement room and offered me a meal of spaghetti, as a matter of course. I felt I did not need to make conversation with her, just to listen to what she said and to answer now and then. She was a sculptor as I had thought, and the part of the room, near the window, which she used for her work, was cluttered with half finished clay statues and carvings in stone and wood. I liked her work, and I told her so. This made both of us feel good, and I began to experience that certain kind of pleasure, or rather happiness, which comes from a man and woman being pleased with each other. Why she should be pleased with me I did not know, because she was the first girl I had ever known, but I soon discovered why.

Her clothes were scattered around the room, and she tidied them away unselfconsciously. Her pants and bras and stockings were like her herself, and I wondered at the strangeness of women. Without a word she slipped off her skirt and blouse and put on trousers and a sweater. Her body had the solidity of sculpture, and while I realised I desired it because I desired her, I was afraid. She watched me watching her, and I felt that she wanted to know my reaction, and was satisfied.

After the meal, she told me that her father, a country parson, did not want her to be an artist, but she had won a scholarship to the school and he had not prevented her from taking it up. She said that she mostly ignored the other students, the boys were either unbearably ambitious or

neuter, neither men nor homosexual, and the girls, by and large, were being 'finished' before settling down to middle-class marriage. After a while she said to me :

'Are you very professional?'

I asked why.

'Because I can't pay you, but I should like you to pose for a figure I'm doing. Would you?'

'You can regard it as a return for the meal, if you like,' I said. And I took off my clothes.

She began to draw me, but although I tried, I could not stand there, in her room, naked, in front of her. I felt a sad, baffled longing for her, and I could only think that she was the first woman, other than my mother, to come alive for me, and I felt helpless.

I said :

'I'm sorry, I want to, but I can't pose for you, here.'

She looked at me and smiled, a gentle, warming smile.

'Did you think you could?'

I was surprised at this question.

'I—don't know,—I thought so, didn't you?'

'I hoped not. What do you want to do?'

'I don't know. Please—don't play.'

'I'm not playing.'

She came up to me and said :

'You're a virgin, aren't you?'

In order not to answer her question, I kissed her, and she threw her arms around me passionately and kissed me back.

I trembled, and she said :

'You're cold.'

I wasn't cold, but I was afraid.

'I'll dress if you want me to,' I offered.

'No,' she replied, and took off her clothes.

She was young, and not skilled, but she was loving, and I was and shall always be thankful that it was she who was the first woman I made love with. When we were lying together, she said :

'You're as beautiful as a woman, and yet you are a man, and strong. I was afraid you might be homosexual, but it's only that you haven't any experience—and yet—'

'There's only one thing to be said,' I interrupted. 'I like you because you are loving.'

'I'm glad you like me. I wanted you for your body, I love beautiful male bodies, but I didn't *have* you for that reason.

You're so tentative, I'm so glad you're gentle—will we fall in love, do you think?'

'Let's not think,' I said.

'You're right,' she agreed. 'Let's just be happy with what we've got. But -you probably think I'm too eager, some kind of nymphomaniac.' It was the only real doubt she had shown.

'Of course not. You're lovely as you are,' I answered.

'Thank you,' she said, and blushed.

'Now I'll pose for you, if you like,' I offered.

'Will you? Oh, how wonderful!' And she drew me and we talked for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER TWO

My relationship with Anna was the first I had had of which I did not, for some time, foresee the end Ted had been my friend, but I had always realised we should part; in the long run we wanted different things. But Anna and I understood one another, we might have kept our friendship for life, or perhaps I like to imagine that we might have done.

She was a pure, clean, open girl, without any calculation about her, whom I liked for what she was, and she said she liked me because I had a soul, whereas most people had lost theirs or given it away. I hardly knew what she meant, but I felt that something in me had been assented to by her, something beyond what I did or might do, or what I was at the time; it was an acknowledgement of an unrealised self.

At first, the real difference between being with her and being with Ted was the approval I felt, in general, for being 'normal', for having a woman. I could not see why, in a society which increasingly seemed to me to be artificial almost as far as possible, the natural should be the moral, although I know that, in the end, they are not separate. What is natural for people is only so for individuals, not for groups, but I supposed it was that most people are, or wish to be, heterosexual, and I had become one of the sexual majority. This knowledge in itself irked me. I did not feel that there is anything innately desirable about heterosexuality as such, but I benefited from it, I felt socially confirmed, to a certain degree, by what Anna and I did in private.

I told Anna about Ted, and we agreed that what the body of the loved one was like, whether male or female, was only a matter of the type of pleasure one received from it, it was the nature of the relationship which really mattered. I asked her whether she could make love to a woman, and she said that women seemed to her more beautiful than men, but she had never met a woman she could like as she liked me for having, as she thought, the strength of both.

We often spent our evenings together. She would draw me and I would write, or just sit by her fire and think. She made no demands, expected nothing, and seemed entirely independent for other than friendship or sex. We gradually became accustomed to each other sexually, but with her I could never lead, I sensed when she wanted me and made love to her accordingly, but I felt that in doing this I was not quite true to myself. I wanted to be gentle with her, and I was, but sometimes I felt an urge to hurt her, not from anger but for my pleasure, and for mastery, which I could not have expressed even had I wished. With her, perhaps because of the newness of it, the otherness of the female body was a constant wonder to me, I was fascinated by breasts, hips, the absence between the thighs which is the feminine, and when I told Anna this, she said that women also feel themselves as an absence relative to men, and that perhaps this was why they did not feel men's bodies to be strange, but that these attitudes were the results of civilisation and we must learn to tolerate differences, especially sexual ones.

While I knew she was right, I could not accept her body as body absolute. The stickiness between her thighs, the slight spurt of milk which I could taste from her breast, when I sucked it, were always part of some relative experience, as though here there was pleasure and fulfilment of desire, but there could be something which transcended this flesh, a body which was also essence.

And it was my mother who, quite without knowing, provoked this dissatisfaction. She became ill, and I was told she was dying. For years she had been all I had had, and I could not bear the thought of losing her. She spent most of her time in bed, and althought she did not ask me to, I read to her and listened to her reminiscences as often as I could. She was still happy about the past, but she was not happy about me. She had captured my soul from the beginning, she had enslaved me to her ineffable image, and

for this, as she lay dying, she felt guilty, but it was done and could not be undone.

'Are you all right, Joseph?' she asked 'You haven't inherited a great deal of practicality.' She tried to smile. 'There is no one to look after you now, you look so thin.'

'I'm fine, mother,' I answered. 'Rest, and don't worry about me.'

For the past few years, it had been I who had taken care of her, but she had never ceased to doubt my capabilities, and I felt that without this doubt she would hardly have been able to bear her fate. But I suspect now that I was wrong, that she did not wish to doubt me, but at the time, I could not have proved *her* wrong, that I was stronger than she knew, and so I could not really have made her happier. I would have wished to tell her everything, to have her understanding, her approval, her forgiveness and for the first time I knew tragedy, the loss or denial of that which seems humanly indispensable, of that which we need or want and seem to have a right to expect, and the fact that I I could not speak to her, selfish though it was, made me cry long before I cried as I walked to her grave.

I longed to show Anna to her, but I dare not. However guilty she felt, I knew her jealousy would be greater, and I did not want to hurt her in her last days But I knew that the way she had enslaved me Anna never could. Anna was flesh, and bone, and the longing of the hole between the thighs to be filled by my flesh, whereas my mother was the remote, the far, the fair Helen and the glorious Aphrodite, the unreachable goddess of more than love.

It was not only that I could not spend much time with Anna, which she perfectly understood, nor that I could not take her to see my mother, which she did not really understand, but that I became obsessed with the difference between the inexpressible longings which the thought of my mother could arouse, and the simple, human, and what seemed like commonplace satisfactions which Anna afforded me.

During the evenings I did spend with Anna, I would sometimes sit for hours without speaking to her, I suspect she thought she had a rival, which was true, it was my mother.

She began to make demands, and one evening she said :

'You don't listen to me, Joseph.'

'I was just thinking,' I replied.

'Thinking! You don't concentrate, and an artist *must* concentrate!'

I walked out of her room and went home to my mother.

Anna had lost all meaning for me, the pleasures we had shared and enjoyed had become futile. I felt I was alone, but I had my dreams. The demands of the flesh, the endless desires and fulfilments no longer interested me. I was still fascinated by woman, the strangeness of her actual being, but I no longer wanted Anna. Had I been older, or more mature, I might have talked to her about it, my attitude might have become a stage on the way to a lasting love, but as it was I could only break away.

I did not think about it then, but it might have been that to choose Anna at that time would have meant eventually to take responsibility for her emotional life, and that unconsciously I realised this and wished to avoid it, for I had been burdened from my childhood by my mother, and when she was gone I wanted to be able to mourn her and to let the burden slip from me, and be what I was, a youth ready to unfold. Later, Anna wrote to me, telling me she had been ill and asking me to come to see her. I answered her as gently as I could, trying to explain what I did not myself understand, how it was that my mother's imminent death should mean the death of my feeling for Anna, too. But I did not go to see her then and have never seen her since.

Then my mother sank, and died.

The loss of a mother must always be poignant, even for those who would not have it so. In my case, this still beautiful woman, dazzled by the glory of her one sublime moment, of which I was the fruit, had been my whole life, as I, in reality, was all she had ever had. We can be orphaned not only by the loss of a parent but by the loss of the dearest one, the one who means most to us. By my orphaning, I had lost both, and I was stunned. It was as though I was emptied, and the world from which normlly we live at one remove because our centre is not there, the world of others, became my entire, but anchorless, world.

I sold the house to pay the debts we had accumulated during these months, and moved into a room by myself. I still wrote, although I had never tried for publication, and worked as a model, but the savour had gone out of my activities, and I spent much time on my own. I walked all

over London, to lose myself in the blue sky of a spring morning, or in the unbearable noise of traffic and the thousands of people.

To be metaphorically ground underfoot, to be eliminated, lost, a meaningless fragment of the social scene, must be an experience unique to modern man, and possible whenever one feels there is nothing to hold on to. Society, in our days, gives a man nothing because it is dedicated to the worship of things and has no time for the human, which is always tentative. Efficiency, the watchword of the merely mechanical, makes no allowance for the half-felt and remembered, the dream and the desire, which is most of human life; at least, it ousts them from the movement of daily living. Eliminate, eliminate! is the cry of our soulless world. And I eliminated myself by disappearing into the days and nights of a purposeless existence, and I wandered, and worked and wrote, in an unilluminated trance

At this time, I was reading a good deal, and partly from books and partly from my experiences I evolved certain beliefs. I accepted and believed in a voluntary poverty because it seemed to me that an increase in possessions meant an increase in mechanical work, which I knew to be destructive except in so far as it had to be done and in order to produce comfort, which did not interest me at that time. I lived on one meal a day and no luxuries but a few cigarettes, and I was pleased with myself for trying to live according to ideals. My experience of exploitation as a model, for the work was hard and the pay small, taught me that most people are exploited, used, exhausted by others, and the pain in their limbs at the end of a working day proves it. It seemed to me that we had all lost our way, that the complexity and impurity of our lives needed to be replaced by a new simplicity, a new purity. I often felt as though I were hovering over the human race like a bird, observing the closed-in brevity of lives, the sadness and horror of drudgery and wasted effort, with an immediacy of comprehension which taught me the secret of a whole life in an instant. Poor, suffering, human race! I could love human beings in the abstract, but I had not one friend, and I longed for human connections.

I sometimes thought of Anna, the sweet succulence of that flesh which never satisfied but left me bereft of fantasy, and I wondered about her present life, for I knew she would not remain without a lover. Once, I almost went to see her, but

I knew it was only jealousy that I wanted to take her from her present lover because I had nothing of my own. I was careful to guard against this feeling. We can become vacuums into which everything flows, and to fill which everything we are denied is desired. I set limits to what I would allow myself to desire, which at that time had to be almost nothing.

At least, I did so until the moment which changed my entire existence.

There are people who know exactly how to excite others. Mentally, physically, emotionally, they can intensify the responses of another to fever-pitch, but they do not love or inspire love. Instead, they seek out some flaw or weakness in the personality of the other and by means of this, bind him to themselves with bands as strong as steel. Such a man was Dachs. He was famous when I met him, and I might have guessed that he was important in the wordly sense, but I had not heard of him. One's path may cross that of another, and that may seem like chance, but the relationship which follows, sometimes fateful for a whole life, is never chance, although it may be destiny, and I knew when I saw Dachs, as I have always known when first I saw a person who was to be of great importance in my life, that his fate and mine were bound up together.

I had been walking, had lost myself among the stone and steel, noise, movement, smell, people who were nothing more than fragments of the streets, and I stopped to look at some paintings in the window of a gallery. They were all of human figures in black and white, like silhouettes. They had drama, but no depth, and I did not like them. A voice behind me said :

'What do you think of them?'

I felt an extraordinary sensation penetrate through me as I heard the words, and I turned to see a handsome, no-longer young face, sunburned, somewhat rough, and above all, glamorous. I did not know what to say, he made me feel shabby, almost coarse, yet potentially cultivated.

'I don't like them,' I managed to articulate

'He's very famous,' the man replied.

'That doesn't necessarily mean he is any good,' I found myself saying, defensively, experiencing that peculiar awkwardness which I was to feel in his presence for a long time to come, for the first time.

'I agree. You interest me. Shall we have a coffee together?'

I said yes, I could not have said no, and in this fashion, in a moment, our friendship began. I call it friendship for want of a better word, it was really something both more and less. That afternoon, we sat for several hours, and most of the time he talked. He was strong, powerful, utterly dominating. I felt that by being with him I was placing myself within a demonic power which, with one part of me, I should have liked to avoid, but I could not have helped it.

He took me to an expensive café where the other customers were, in the main, well-dressed, leisured and arrogant. I was conscious of being shabby, but I felt protected by being with Dachs. Some people staring at me made me aware that I was handsome, and I felt, not that I was poor, but as though I were free to choose my shabby clothes, whereas they were obliged to wear their elegant ones. Later I realised that, socially, this is the aristocratic feeling, that Dachs behaved and seemed like an aristocrat, when he wished to do so, and he made me feel as though I were aristocratic too. From that first afternoon, I was aware that I was slipping into his world, that I wanted to give myself to him although I could not imagine that he would ever give himself to me, that my ideals of poverty and purity seemed ridiculous and naïve. I wanted to resist him, yet I could not, I was fascinated. I felt a sense of security with him, for the first time in my life. The world seemed open before me, and I imagined it was mine.

He spoke of many things, in his charming manner, but I did not so much listen to his words as bask in his overpowering personality. I remember he told me that he believed above all in art as the highest expression of beauty which was, in his eyes, all that mattered in the world. He said that he wished to spend his life discovering and presenting the finest artistic talent that existed, and that he would astonish the world. It seemed to me that, from the moment he entered, he became the pivot of the life of the café. The waiters bowed to him, the customers pointed him out to each other; I discovered the meaning of fame. And I trembled inside myself with pre-knowledge of what was to come.

Certain people cannot be placed socially, for they do not seem to belong to any class or group, although their way of life may associate them with a particular section of the community. Their existence may in itself be a sign that the rigid barriers of caste and class in our society are breaking down, or they may be the means by which these barriers are

broken, or both; they are not a type, but in some way typically human. The great are often of this kind, and there is always something outstanding about them, for, whereas other people seem marked by belonging to a certain section of humanity, as an animal is obviously of a particular species or breed, they are merely themselves. Their features appear more defined than others, their outline clearer, they are individual. Dachs was of this number, and I told him so, and he said that I too was of the same order. His lack of accent, his appearance, added to this impression, and when I asked him where he originated, for there was something indefinably foreign about him, he told me that his family had been of European importance, emigrating from Russia at the time of the revolution, and everything about him seemed to confirm this. Much later in our relationship I discovered the truth, but it was not until it ceased really to matter.

After a while, I told him that I was a writer. He said he was not surprised that I was an artist, that I could not be anything other than an artist, and that he would be extremely interested to see some of my work. I had nothing with me, and I did not want to take him to my shabby room. I told him that I would meet him the following day, and bring some of my work with me. He pressed me to stay, insisted that I have dinner with him, but I would not, I had to get away, before my feelings got the better of me and I could not have got away. He gave me the address of his hotel and made me promise to come the following evening.

I could not sleep that night. I was torn between two worlds, my world and his, or what I imagined was his based on my experience of him. He made my life seem sordid, a sub-life fit only for a slave. He was not as I imagined the great artists to be—in fact, he was almost the logical opposite of a great artist but he made me feel free of the petty and squalid, and this corresponded to something of which I had always unconsciously dreamed.

The following day, hours before I was due to meet him, I walked to his hostel. It was one of the largest hotels in London, the kind of place in which I had never been. I had not had the desire to enter such a place, and I tended to despise what it represented, but now the thought excited me, for it had become alive for me and I wanted to know what it contained. I was precisely on time when I knocked on his door.

The carpetings, the furnishings, the comfort of the suite both awed and irritated me, but when I saw him, who was without doubt the master of all that this implied, I was extraordinarily intrigued. He wore a white suit which fitted his strong physique to perfection, and he smelled of some wonderful perfume, exotic and inflaming. Before I could say anything, he said:

'There is a little something for you, over there, on the couch. Open it, it's yours.'

I was doubtful, but I was curious to see what was in the large box. It was a most elegant outfit of clothes, trousers and jacket, shirt and tie, the finest I had ever seen.

'Put them on, please. I think you will like them,' he said.

I did not want to undress in front of him. But I did not wish to ask not to, and so, hurriedly and without looking at him, I tried on the clothes. They fitted me as though they had been made for me.

'How did you know my size?' I asked.

He just laughed. 'If you like them, they're yours,' he said.

I did not want to take them, or rather, I was afraid of my desire for them. I felt that, once I took these things, it would be the beginning of a down-hill progress which I would not be able to stop, that the first thing I possessed which I loved and to which I might become attached would corrupt me, for ever.

'No. Thank you, but I can't take them.'

He looked disappointed, then angry.

'I want you to take them. I spent some time, valuable time, in choosing them, is it much to ask, that you accept a gift I have especially chosen for you, when you look like a young god in them?'

I did not like that last expression, it seemed affected, insincere, but I did not want to offend him, and I thought that, after all, it would not hurt to accept them.

'Thank you, it is very kind.'

'That's better. I want you to be well-dressed, you can wear clothes as few people can. They are easy to buy and they make such a difference. Now let us have dinner.' And we went down to the restaurant.

After a magnificent meal we went back to his suite. Apprehensively, I showed him something I had written. He said it revealed great talent, and I was made happier and more satisfied by that remark than by almost anything in my life. We drank, we smoked, we listened to music, and

then he said that it was much too pleasant an evening to bring to an end, why didn't I have a bath and stay for the night? I felt it was something pre-ordained, and I consented. He perfumed the bath himself, and afterwards he said that I should have his bed while he slept on the couch. We both lay silently for some time and then, as I had known he would, without a word he came to the bed.

Each of my loves has had a completeness and sufficiency in their own person, the character of a world, especially Dachs. His was the luxury and pleasure of the king, a magic realm of fabulous cities where everything was dedicated to his wish, and when he chose to please, it was with the immense significance of gesture of some eastern potentate of old towards a favourite slave. That first night I was stirred to an extraordinary pitch of passion, resentment, desire, almost fury, by him, and I felt a joy in abandonment which frightened me but which I was not able to resist. My memories are intermingled with the smell of sandalwood, the feel of silken sheets, and my own wonder.

In the morning, he said:

'I imagine you live alone.'

I said that I did.

'And what do you do for a living?'

I told him about the modelling.

'Give up your room and your work, and come and live here, with me. I shall look after you, and with my help you will soon be earning money with your writing. I feel that we have been looking for each other for a long time.'

CHAPTER THREE

I did not really feel that I had been looking for him, but he almost convinced me that I had been, because I wished to be convinced. I went to live with him as he asked, perhaps because he needed me and no-one else did need me, and because I had never before experienced the like of our love-making. The power and strength of his being was like a magic radiance, both terrifying and fulfilling. A body such as his, formed by the strength of an invincible will, can give one a norm by which to measure all other experience, or so it seemed to me then. This feeling was not to last as long as the time for which we lived together, it could not have

lasted, but I was enchained by it for the entire time I felt it to be there.

I knew that my previous loves, both Ted and Anna, had been strange, but Dachs was the strangest and most extraordinary person I had ever known.

Although he had great intelligence, and realised that a great deal of what passes for the genuine, especially in the realm of art, is really false, he himself habitually mixed the pseudo with the real, for his mind was entirely at the service of his senses, and he wished, above all to be pleased. I pleased him, I believe that physically I always delighted him, and it amused him and flattered his immense vanity - he was almost the quintessence of the vain - to believe he was forming and moulding me into something worthy of himself and all he represented. He knew the falseness of this, that talent has no master, and as he believed in and understood creative talent and believed that I possessed it, he must have realised that he was, essentially, pretentious, but like most of the pretentious he did not care, for he wished, at whatever cost, to be pre-eminent, and when I met him, he was.

He took me with him to exhibitions, galleries, shops, where, perhaps at first to impress me, or partly so, he would with infallible taste choose an exquisite item for his collection of pottery, or painting, or other works of art. These collections were not large, but they contained marvellous specimens of the ancient and the new - white, red and yellow vases from China and Korea; blue and gold paintings from Persia; stone sculpture from Egypt and Greece, and modern works selected from the world. They had been chosen from here and there, and blended, as only he could do, into an incomparable whole.

He would never say that anything was too expensive, but if it was more than he wished to pay, that the seller wanted too great a profit and he did not intend to oblige him.

By the people with whom he dealt I was treated with the kind of deference which is usually given to beautiful women, the companions of rich and powerful men. They knew or guessed at our relations, but it was nothing remarkable in their world, they were used to it, and some probably were inclined to similar tastes. They bowed to me, opened doors for me, and spoke extremely politely, but they managed to convey that, although my taste and wishes might be de-

ferred to, and my praise bring a smile, the decision which mattered, to buy or not to buy, rested with Dachs alone.

This was of course true, but nonetheless, almost from the beginning, I felt robbed of something, of a right of manhood, and thus it is that money, the present-day right of the strongest, confers adulthood on its possessor, and makes a child of him who lacks it, or rather, the worship of money does this.

Dachs worked a great deal, for his claim that he would astonish the world was no idle boast. He discovered unknown artists in every field—painting, writing, sculpture, music—and presented them to the world so that the world almost always accepted them at the value he put upon them. I was not jealous, for I knew from the beginning that what he did for others he would also do for me, and there was one aspect of his personality only in which his proclivities conformed with convention he wanted only one love at a time. I knew that he often had flirtations, even affairs, but he had only one stable relationship. A man of his type can never resist what seems beautiful to him, and in people his concept of beauty was almost synonymous with youth, he would have been in his element as a Greek of the classic period.

I would sometimes see him stand, during a reception or party, his hands folded in front of him, his weight resting slightly more on one foot than the other, speaking with some young man of striking appearance, and I knew that he was attracted. He would not smile, but speak seriously and slowly, a picture of concentration; it was a courting posture. Even when I knew it was someone he had made love with, or would almost certainly do so, I was never really jealous. At the time I did not ask myself why, I was simply pleased that I was glad for him that he had found another aspect of what was genuinely his supreme pleasure, and glad for myself that I should not find this painful. Now I realise that it was because I did not love him. Later, when I loved, my jealousy became involved and I was obliged to deal with it, but with him, what I was really seeking, without knowing that I did so, was for him to betray me These flirtations and affairs were not, and were not intended to be, betrayals, and I was well aware of it, but had he fallen in love with another it would have meant the end of our relationship, we should have had to part, and it would have been because of his faithlessness, which would have given me the satisfaction

of being innocent. I had allowed him to assume a moral ascendency over me, because in some way our friendship was a betrayal of myself. When we do this, our wish is that the other shall betray both himself and us, so that we can then feel that, after all, he was not worthy of us; of the two traitors, he betrayed both, and so we feel that we were always, in some sense, more faithful than he. Whether deliberately, in order to prevent this, or not, Dachs never did fall in love with another, and it may have been because no other met his need as I did. For a relationship he needed constantly near him the embodiment of what, in himself, he could not possess, it had to be the same person because the good and the bad of a friendship mature over a long period of time, and he wished to intensify everything. His fickleness he could exploit with casual loves, but his constancy he needed in the way a connoisseur needs to savour a very rare wine, slowly, gradually and with concentrated sense.

Therefore he was jealous of me. He kept me with him for all but minutes at a time, except when I was writing, and then he almost always appeared as though by magic, just as I put down my pen for the day. He watched me closely for signs of desire for others, for he was surrounded by attractive young men and women, but I had always been incapable of casual affairs and from the beginning I found Dachs by far the most interesting of his circle. Interesting, but infuriating, overpowering and destructive.

He was one of those people for whom the telephone, which has eliminated distance but helped to increase the pace of life to its present frenetic pitch, is a major instrument of power. He did most of his work, or rather, ruling, from the suite, spending whole mornings and sometimes days, gathering the reins of his many willing and unwilling steeds into his hands, guiding them here and there, letting them run at his bidding.

'No, no, no!' he disapproved, to one unfortunate who tried to protest.

'I have already made it quite clear, you are not to pay more than I told you for that painting or I do not use you again! What's that? Yes, I realise he is a wonderful painter, or I should not have made his name known, but to him, what I offer is a great deal of money, whereas I need much more. Very well, there are other paintings I could sell for more, and other people waiting to buy them for me. Then

you will? Good, that's better. Now do as I wish, immediately!'

Then, weary of spirit, putting down the instrument, he turned to me and said:

'That man will earn me a considerable sum today, but he is no good, I shall not use him again, he costs me too much effort. A cigar, please, Joseph.'

I gave him his cigar, but I was very angry. A man who knows how to demand will receive much of what he wants, but on the personal level his demands were invidious, and he knew it. His justification was that he also helped many people, and within the framework in which he worked and had his being this was not so much untrue as double-edged, he helped them and he hurt them, as he was to do for me.

From writing poems and stories I graduated to writing books. I discovered that the combination of the intensity of feeling which Dachs aroused in me, together with the security I now had, was fruitful, as he had known it would be, and I was able to settle to consistent periods of work. He made a few suggestions about my first book, which I followed, then pronounced it admirable and said that he was willing to take a chance with it. Among his other interests, he owned a publishing house, and he printed it on his own presses. It may have been his own opinion of it which influenced others, but it began to sell, and with my second book I was accepted.

At least, the worth of my writing had begun to be accepted, but it was suggested by some people that Dachs' help was so considerable that I was not only dependent on him for publication, but that I was incapable of producing a publishable work without him. This, while it was not Dachs' fault, seemed to me the most damaging aspect of my relationship with him, and it was not true. I did not actually need his help, but he liked to give it and his suggestions were usually relevant. The people to whom a young writer can look for the assistance he may need are few, for those who can give what they have to give without interfering with the writer's own view of life are not many, and if such help is forthcoming from one with whom the author has an intimate relationship, the jealousy of others may seize its opportunity, and bite, for the jealousy of relationship is as fundamental as the jealousy of talent. Those who were jealous of me could perhaps have forgiven me whatever talent I may have exhibited, but that I was also beloved of

Dachs, for whose approval they hungered, must have seemed to them unforgivable.

When Dachs heard the rumours that he was supposed to have written what I had written, he laughed.

'I'm flattered, my boy, for you have a real gift. But they should realise it is all grist to my mill, for they are talking about you and me, and that is what matters.'

I did not really agree with him, but his confidence, and his contempt for his enemies, made me feel that I could afford to ignore the negative attitudes of others towards myself and my work, and eventually the rumours died a natural death.

Even after this, which gave me a feeling that I was of some social significance, I remained shy and ill-at-ease among Dachs' friends, they were hostile egos fighting for recognition, and because of this most of them hated me. I did not defend myself against them although I might have done, I was simply baffled, most of the time, as to how to express towards them what was native to me to express, and for this they tried to pretend that I was immature and childish, but I was not, they and I knew I was already a recognised artist with a growing following, although I did not yet approve of my work, and while I was not able to avoid their presence because Dachs always insisted that I accompany him everywhere, I developed a habit of silence among the crowd of his satellites.

About this time, we began the financial arrangement which lasted until a few months ago. Dachs paid for my keep, and gave me an allowance out of the money earned from my books, the rest contributed to his other artistic ventures and his aim of finding and presenting the finest young talent of our time. As I had become enthusiastic about these aims and was not interested in money for its own sake, I allowed him to do as he pleased, and it was, as he well knew, a relief to me to have my financial affairs taken care of by someone other than myself.

Whether he was rich or poor I did not know, and he may not have known himself. There was always money, sometimes large amounts, from the exhibitions he arranged, the plays he put on, the pictures he sold, and there was always lavish expenditure.

We lived on a princely scale. He had a valet, a handsome Italian, who was polite but indifferent to me because he may have been in love with his master, and whom I avoided.

There was a maid, a tiny exquisite Danish girl who was the only woman Dachs could bear to have near him, and whom I believe he kept in order to see whether I was tempted by her, for she was attracted to me. Had I not been overwhelmed by Dachs, I might have run away with her, for she represented a subtle desire for a reciprocal love which my present circumstances made to seem like boredom, and I was as kind and gentle to her as I could manage to be, but I totally resisted her charms.

Dachs could provoke me beyond endurance with his easy assumption that I was his to command, but I could not argue with him, he confused me when I came into conflict with his wishes, it was always he who was noble and wronged, he was doing his best to make sure I was cared for, as, according to him, I needed to be, at a time when he had a thousand other matters to attend to, while I was being childish, frivolous and inconsiderate. I knew that basically I was none of these things, but the horror of power is that what it assumes to be true *is* true, to all appearances, and I felt myself becoming only what he wished me to be.

Sometimes we did not speak for a day or two, but we always made friends again, or rather, I made friends with him, for I wished to be his friend, he had taught me much, I sincerely admired his abilities, at least at that time, and we could usually manage to be reconciled with each in the collusion of bed.

Without effort, he had retained his strong compact figure into middle-age, although his face looked younger. Physically, I was stronger than he, and as with Anna it was my combination of the masculine and the tentative which seemed to inflame him. I was perhaps the only person who could dominate him sexually, but it was my secret despair that I did not want to do this, that, with him, my one desire was to be dominated, and it was this limitation which made me decide that, eventually, I must get away.

How, I did not know, for he showed no signs of having tired of me, and I was hardly ever alone. When a relationship to which both are committed has continued for a long time, each of the persons concerned becomes another when it is over, the third existence which is the relationship dies, and the separate beings are not what they were when it existed nor what they were before it existed, and it is this which makes such relationships difficult to break. I

could not imagine what I would be without Dachs, it would be a new identity, and he would not be quite the same without me, and I became afraid of what I knew was the inevitable future.

We were, as I have said, surrounded by an entourage of men and women in which new faces were constantly to be seen, and which it was extremely difficult for other highly gifted artists or their parasites to join. One evening, at one of the gatherings Dachs constantly held a young woman came up to me the moment I entered the room and began to speak. She told me she was an artist but in fact she was an art student who had just read one of my books and wanted to meet me. To be spoken to by a strange young woman was always a painful experience for me. I stood there for about a minute without speaking, and finally walked away, to Dachs, who had just appeared. Some time later, a young man whom I knew and liked rather more than the others, came up to me and said there was a pretty girl who was eager to talk to me, but that I should not feel obliged to say anything in return. I looked and saw Maggie, for that was her name, smiling towards me. Seeing her smile, Dachs whispered to me that he was bored and wished to leave, meaning that I should leave with him. But there was something about Maggie which appealed to me. I felt the excitement and wonder which always manifests itself when my destiny is about to alter, and for the first time since I met him I ignored Dachs, and walked over to the girl.

This time I did say something, but mostly I listened to her musical voice, and out of the corner of my eye I watched Dachs storm out of the room in a rage. I thought Maggie beautiful with her long dark hair and oval face, like a pre-Raphaelite with fire, but I was too shy to say so. She told me how highly she thought of my book, and that she quite understood that I found it difficult to communicate with anyone in such a crowd.

I was apprehensive about Dachs, but I was grateful to Maggie. I knew that she was attracted to me and that she was a person to whom I could respond, and I felt not only that she might be the means by which I could change my life, but that she wished to be. I excused myself and left her, before I realised that I had no idea where I could find her again.

I found Dachs in a towering rage. He hated women and he hated being crossed, and he had always been afraid of

losing me. As I stood there, almost like a frightened child while he roared at me, cursed all women and swore that if I were to make him look ridiculous over some idiotic ugly female he would have nothing more to do with me, I felt for the first time that his fear was greater than mine, that these rages were the outward expression of hidden terror, of something he could not face. My fear was of the unknown, of what I would be without him, but I knew that the source of my being was in myself. I could see now that, to him, every loss was a little death, that he and an object of his desire were one, and to lose it was to die, by just so much. And then I experienced him as an object for the first time, and like all human object-existences he seemed ridiculous, ridiculous and ugly, like an ugly, angry, no longer young woman.

I did not argue with him, and while I could see now that it was he who was doing what he had often accused me of doing, I felt that he still might get the better of me socially, that he might make me appear childish and ridiculous to the world, and I felt trapped, his jealousy was a frightful burden, and I longed for something more natural.

Lately, I had been thinking of Anna, that there had been a sound and healthy basis to our relations, for we had obeyed the urge of life, to live, and renew, and continue. And with Ted, there had been a need which had not exceeded itself into possession, for there had been mutual love, even mutual trust. But with Dachs, the attraction had had the force of a kind of fetishism, he had worshipped my body and I had surrendered to the powers of his, and this, while deprived from nature, as it could only be, was not nature, it was an exploitation of natural things through ourselves. It was this which made our quarrels so destructive, for they were rooted in nothing but our desires and needs, behind them loomed an endless vacuum, we were unholy. I began to suspect, although I could not be sure, that this was because our love was homosexual We can all fall from grace, we all must, and when we do, we inevitably fall back on whatever there lies behind us as an aspect of natural reality, the worship of things, of the penis, of the breast, or the dizzying void of fear. But behind the homosexual relation stands only whatever awful prohibition prevents that person from facing the other as a being formed in his own image, but differently I did not and do not feel that there is anything wrong with the love of a man for a man, but when they inevitably find

themselves in a relation which is not love, even momentarily, then they are thrown into the midst of a meaningless universe in which they have no anchor.

After this, we did not speak for a day or two, and then once again, I made it up with him, but we were not the same. I continually thought of Maggie. I wanted to ask the young man who had called my attention to her if he knew where I could find her, but I didn't, because Dachs kept a close watch over me, and I did not want to give him cause to think I was betraying him. If I left him, or was about to leave him, I wanted to be able to tell him so, openly and frankly, but as yet I did not know what I would do.

One morning, as we were eating lunch in the restaurant of one of the large public galleries, where we had gone to see an exhibition Dachs had promoted, I heard that musical voice:

'Hullo, it's Joseph, isn't it?'

I looked up, into Maggie's eyes. Once again I felt that excitement as I sensed the workings of destiny, and a leap in my throat because Maggie was barely half-a-yard away.

I could feel Dachs' tremendous anger, although he said nothing. He deliberately turned his back on Maggie, as he sometimes did in the presence of someone he wished to insult.

'Mr Dachs doesn't seem to approve of me, but I approve of his work. What a wonderful exhibition!'

Such praise never failed to please Dachs, although sometimes, like now, he did not choose to show it. He did not turn round, and I said to Maggie:

'You must excuse him, he is very tired, it's been a great deal of work.'

'Yes,' she replied. 'I'm sure he's been through a great deal, but I'm very glad to see you again.' And she shook my hand, pressing a piece of paper into it as she did so.

I crumpled the paper and put it into my pocket without Dachs noticing anything. He turned to me:

'You deliberately arranged this,' he began, white with anger, but I wished to avoid a quarrel, whatever I had to say.

'No, that kind of modern girl, who dresses like a man, bores me. I wouldn't be interested in her at all, she isn't a type I could like.'

Dachs looked at me in surprise, for the remark was not what he had expected.

'You deliberately did it to annoy me.'

'No, I think we are both worthy of better than that.' And there was nothing more he could say.

I went to the toilet to look at the piece of paper. It said :

'Meet me on your own, I am rash enough to think you want to', and she had put a telephone number.

'Yes, Maggie, I do and I will,' I said to myself.

I touched the writing to my lips in a gesture which was foreign to me but seemed appropriate for Maggie, and as I put the paper carefully away in my pocket I felt this to be the real beginning of our relationship.

CHAPTER FOUR

During the following two weeks, I could not find an opportunity even to telephone Maggie without Dachs' knowledge. It would have been useless to say to him : 'I am going to call Maggie' because this, to him, would have been the same as saying : 'I no longer want you'. It was true, I no longer wanted him, and I did want Maggie, but I could not tell him because I could not envisage the relationship with Maggie, I did not know what that relationship might be, and after all, I had hardly spoken to her. Up to this point, what meeting her had done was to make me aware of the distance between myself and Dachs rather than of what she was. A sexual meeting between two people can be blinding, mine had always been so, but the parting from a lover is always a heightening of consciousness, for pain provokes consciousness as a grain of sand provokes a pearl, and as joy provokes knowledge, the fruit of consciousness. I experienced Maggie as I had experienced my mother, as an enhaloed being whose feet barely touched the earth as she walked, but Dachs I saw now, for the first time, as someone entirely alien to my dreams.

Dachs was above all an organiser, and this is a type which, while probably in existence from earliest times, came into prominence with the modern age, when industrialism brought into being the religion of work. For this, high priests were needed, and the high priests of work are the organisers of work. As with all social religions, the belief was, and is, that without priests there is no ritual, and without ritual the religion cannot exist. It is a strange fact that, in our time, these prophets of work are also the devotees of

pleasure, for pleasure is the obverse side of the coin, only he who loves truth can decide the value of the currency, and for him, work springs from his love

And I believed in love, that only that which is freely given and taken can have value, and I had given myself to Dachs knowing that he would not give himself to me, for organisation as he practised it means that men are moved mechanically, by desire or greed or fear, and this is a manipulation of the will, not a giving I had fought against this knowledge because I had not wished to be aware of it, and I wanted to change Dachs But meeting Maggie, who appeared sufficiently sure of both of us to take chances had made me face my awareness of Dachs' selfishness, and I was forced to acknowledge the total lack of emotional response on his part.

It increased my difficulty that, by chance, we had a great deal to do at this time. Dachs was producing an opera, or rather, he was supervising the production of an opera, an enormous and lavish production of which some part of the libretto was my work I do not think that he knew very much, if anything, about music but he always knew how to rob the intelligences of others. He would claim that the experts are there to know, his job was to give them work I do not believe in 'experts' nor the 'giving' of work. I believe in creation, but Dachs' methods produced success, which is sometimes only the best of many poor efforts, and in this case the efforts he made were really almost worthy of a true master. He could hardly pause to sleep or eat and I was obliged to be with him the entire time For this, some of his minions nicknamed me 'the shadow'. They would not have said it to my face, but I got to hear of it and it wounded me deeply, and strengthened my inner resolve to end this relationship.

The critics enthused about the opening performance, and then, just when he would have had time to rest, for the first time for months, Dachs collapsed from the strain, and had to be carried to bed.

He could hardly speak, his illness was diagnosed as some kind of nervous paralysis, and no-one but his medical attendants and myself were allowed to see him. I sat by his bedside for most of the first night, but he was semi-conscious and did not recognise me, or could not indicate if he did I was genuinely sorry that he was ill, he could not have borne to live in a crippled or paralysed state, and it was some hours

before the doctors were sure that he would recover. But I was also afraid that he would be more potent and powerful and demanding in this supine state than he was when he was active, that as long as he was ill, even if it should be for years, he might be able to make me attend at his bedside and administer to his needs.

I wanted to be good to him, but I could not do for him as I had done for my mother when she lay dying and I had given her what she wanted without her having to ask. In going to live with Dachs, I had followed my feelings and obeyed his will. I knew that now, if I were to leave, the roles would have to be reversed and I should need all my resolution to reject his feelings, and that perhaps this was my opportunity, when his will would not obey him and his feelings were inoperative. Towards morning, I saw that he was sleeping and breathing peacefully, and I stole away, telling his nurse that I was going to get some sleep myself, and if he was to wake and ask for me, I would be back in a few hours.

I did sleep for a while, and then I went for a walk through the almost deserted streets, enjoying the novel sensation of freedom from Dachs' presence, but I was guilty, for I had deserted a human being in his moment of helplessness.

I rang the number Maggie had given me. I was afraid that she would not be there, or worst of all, that she would be with a lover, but she answered, and once again I heard that lovely voice. I apologised for calling so early, but she said :

'That doesn't matter, I was awake. But—are you alone?'

I said that I was.

'Good, you managed it then.'

I did not quite know how to answer. It had taken me several weeks to make this call, she knew just why it had taken so long, and I would not have been making it now if Dachs was not ill. I did not want to apologise for keeping her waiting, but it would be understandable if she had lost interest, and I had to know to what extent she appreciated my position and what her attitude was, because I wanted her and needed her help.

'Do you know' I asked, feeling it might be easier to say this over the telephone 'what my relationship is with Dachs?'

'I think so,' she replied, not at all surprised at the question. 'And what do you imagine I feel about it?'

'I hoped and you will have to forgive me for saying this —that you would feel angry and humiliated.'

'Well, if it is any pleasure to you, I do.'

'I should like to change those feelings to happier ones.'

'I see.' She was silent for a moment, I felt she was relieved. 'And—can you?'

'Shall I say,' I replied, 'that I am perhaps more of what you might wish me to be than of what I might appear to be?'

'Oh, I hope so! From your books, you know, you sound just as I should wish you to be.'

'Thank you.'

'But' she asked, doubtfully, 'could you prefer—a woman?'

'Oh yes, but you'll see. I intend to change my life.'

'Can you—will you come to see me?'

I told her about Dachs.

She said that she couldn't really feel very sorry for him, but did it mean that I was free, for the time being, to come and go as I pleased? I said I would find out if he was still asleep or unconscious, but before I could finish my sentence she broke in:

'Come and see me in two hours, whatever happens. Say you will!'

And I promised her that I would.

I called Dachs' nurse, who told me that he had been given a sleeping drug and was not expected to regain consciousness until the following day.

I sat in a restaurant over a cup of coffee, realising that I was about to make a fateful step, and now that I might finally have to make up my mind, wondering what I really ought to do. That Dachs might be vicious, I realised, but there was nothing he could do while he was ill, and that might be for some time. It was not so much that I was afraid of him, as of his turning other people against me, but when I thought about it, I realised that even if he did, there was little actual harm that he could do, he could not really damage me in any way I cared about, it was more a matter of nerves, that he gave the impression he could harm. But there was something else. If I left him now, I realised that it was a farewell to the entire way of life I had with him, including the physical love. Even now, there were things about him, physically, which overwhelmed me, I could not think of his naked body without taking breath. I would have to give up an accustomed and intensely cultivated pleasure, and if it had been the pleasure alone I would not have minded, but

it was also a source of strength He was not anyone, he was Dachs, and every muscle and fibre of his body pronounced him Dachs. It was when I thought this thought that I realised the extent of my servitude to him. If he were entirely Dachs, I was entirely Joseph, but I did not assert, in my way, my Joseph-nature, to nearly the extent that he asserted his existence as Dachs, and I had to. It was not a matter of whether I loved Maggie, which I knew I already did, it was first of all a matter of saving myself. And then I knew that my mind was made up, come what may, as I had promised, I should go to Maggie's flat.

I felt that I could hardly wait to see her, and I can remember nothing from the time I left the café until the moment when I called at Maggie's door. Her smile when she appeared, radiantly beautiful, did not quite hide the anxiety which, as I realise now, was always part of her, and I felt that she was somehow older than me, although not in years. Then she laughed, a glorious, musical laugh like the tinkling of bells, and as I followed her up the stairs I was like the acolyte of some ancient cult, following the princess-priestess-prostitute to the shrine where the rites would be consummated.

We sat on cushions on the floor of that unexpectedly austere apartment, and we talked. Maggie sat with her legs folded sideways beneath her, and her thighs slightly parted. For the first time in my life I felt the magnetic attraction of the mysterious and unknown which is so much part of the reason why women wear the clothes they do. It was not the fascination with the actual body which I had felt with Anna, but the appeal of the secret and hidden, the dark mystery of sex. She was beautiful, she appeared determined, and she was afraid. Of what she was afraid I did not know, and I longed to take her in my arms and say: 'Don't be frightened', but I did not, for I felt that she did not know she was frightened, and that perhaps it was because of me, that the woman's fear of the man is perhaps greater than the man's fear of the woman, and the man to the woman, and the woman to the man, are the unknown. There is nothing we fear more than the unknown, and the otherness of the sexual partner is above all unknown and therefore frightening. To trust another is like trusting sleep, which, once we close our eyes, may never let us go, but we must sleep to live, and we must trust to live.

Maggie and I did not know one another, and I yearned

to know her body, literally to expose the shadow between her thighs. She, the dark other, was softened and enhanced by my unknown presence, as I was thrown into strong relief by hers, and we both realised the fearful seriousness of closing the gap between us. My fear was of distance, that to be close to her was to remove fear. Hers was of nearness, that my nearness might be a threat.

I sat and waited, and then she said she liked the sweater I wear wearing. When I told her it was given me by Dachs, she pulled it over my head with an almost frightening violence and threw it into a corner.

'You hate him.'

'No,' she replied. '*You* hate him!'

I did not hate him, I was against what he represented, but I knew what she meant, and her remark, full of meaning, filled me with the prescience of a new life. She was at one with me in my rejection of Dachs as a dominating force, because she knew he injured me, and I began to feel strong, and sure, and self-reliant.

I asked her about herself, and she told me that her mother's family were Slavic aristocrats who had come to England because of the war. I was surprised, because she looked entirely Anglo-Saxon. She said that it was her ambition to become a great painter, but that she did not yet know if she possessed the talent. Even then, without seeing her work, I doubted her capabilities as an artist. Art arises from within, an artist is the communicator of his inner world which is his to bestow because he is its servant, but it seemed to me from the beginning that Maggie's life was too much gathered from without, that she was too much the creation of others to be a creative force herself, but I did not tell her what I thought.

Then she said:

'And do you mean it?'

I knew what she referred to, I had expected some such remark and had hoped she would not make it, for there was no way I could prove that I meant what I said, we were obliged to trust each other.

'I do mean it,' I replied, 'but do you believe that I mean what I say, that I intend to change my relationship with Dachs?'

She did not reply for a moment, and then she said:

'I believe that you wish to change your life now, but I cannot be sure that you will keep to it.'

'Maggie' I interrupted.

'No—hear me out, Joseph, please. Dachs is in bed, you are alone, and there is—myself. How will you feel later on, when Dachs is back to—normal? And do you mean that you do want some kind of relationship with him, still, for if so—'

'Maggie,' I had to speak, 'even if I hadn't met you, I should still have to get away from Dachs, but —I have fallen in love with you.'

'I was hoping you would say that, Joseph, and what do we do about it?'

This was the question I had feared, but I had my answer ready.

'There is nothing I can do about it, at this moment, except to love you.'

She did not reply, but moved a little nearer to me. She was waiting for me to take her in my arms, but I hesitated, it had been a long time since I had embraced a woman, and she was not like Anna. Some women belong to a man and some do not. Anna had really belonged to her work, Maggie was waiting to belong to someone, I hoped it was to me. But I feared to be rejected, because I felt that I might not satisfy her, might never satisfy her. Then, as she moved closer, I was overcome by her nearness, so warm and electric and good, and my feelings moved me of themselves to touch her hair, and as she did not move away, I put my arms around her and kissed her. That kiss seemed to draw my spirit out of my body. I felt, as I had never felt before, that this was happiness, and my life past, present and future—said 'yes' to that moment, to the being before me who was no longer strange.

But while she, in that moment, had become familiar to me, after the actual contact of the kiss she seemed to feel more threatened, and withdrew herself a little, then she said:

'Shall we go for a walk, Joseph, it's a beautiful day?'

I agreed, and we went into Hyde Park, which usually I do not like. A great city like London belongs only to itself, its green spaces belong to its streets and huge, depersonalised buildings; their grass is trodden by anonymous feet. But on that brilliant morning it belonged to us, as we sat by the muddy water of the Serpentine lake I pressed my face into the springing turf and thought: 'Now I live', and I felt an ache of longing in my loins for the moment when Maggie

and I should be alone, and naked, and joined, in bed.

I realised that my relationship with Dachs had been a war, and one in which I felt I had emerged a victor; he was lying unconscious, and would rise again to continue the endless struggle for what he wanted, while I had inherited the earth and its wonders thereof, and my soul as well.

We ate lunch in a restaurant which I do not remember, except that a little old waiter beamed on us as though we were his favourite children. We arrived back at her door tired, dusty, deeply content, and I was shocked to awareness of the things I had willingly forgotten as she said:

'Thank you Joseph, goodbye,' and left me alone.

There was no reason why she should not have done this, but I suppose I was expecting something more. I suddenly felt cold and alone, and I no longer wished to be, or perhaps could have, for long, borne to be, without her. And yet the moment I returned to Dachs' suite, to the aura of his personality which emanated from all his possessions and seemed to exist as a tangible thing even though he was unconscious, I was not sure. I wondered whether I would be exchanging a servitude to Dachs for a worse, a more exacting servitude to Maggie. With Dachs I felt that all his demands were deliberate, wilful, that he could have behaved otherwise but he did not choose to behave otherwise; it was a conscious policy. But a woman is considered privileged to demand of a man, indecisiveness and irrationality are supposedly of her essence, and Maggie had pursued me and then, when we had achieved an easy harmony, left me, to wonder what she meant, whether she cared at all for me or was merely satisfying her fancies with my emotions. With Dachs, I always knew where I was even if I did not like him, but with Maggie I could foresee that, while I might always love her, I might also never know where I really stood with her.

And I was used to a full relationship. With Dachs, and with my other loves, the sexual relation had begun simultaneously with the emotional response, whereas with Maggie, I did not know when I should make love to her, or if I ever would. Yet all these considerations, while they made me alive to the insecurities of my choice, and made me doubt my choice, did not and could not have made me change it. The thing which I had to bring about, and I knew that I did, was to sleep with the woman I had chosen. I had to make love to Maggie, and there was only one way I knew

for when I thought, I realised that she might merely be taking time to consider, and that I might be able to give her reason to have confidence in me, to trust me at my word.

I rang the young man through whom I had first spoken to Maggie, whom I had always liked, and asked him whether I could stay at his flat for a while. He seemed pleased at the suggestion, and I straight away took what clothes I needed —I had moved out. Then I rang Maggie and told her what I had done.

'So you see' I emphasised 'I *do* mean what I say.'

'And are you still sure of what you want?'

'More than ever,' I replied.

'I *think* I know, too' she said 'but I'm not sure. Will you come and see me now—I'm a little frightened.'

'Maggie—if I come, it is on one condition, that I don't leave you tonight.'

'Do you really expect a woman to say yes to that demand, Joseph?'

'It isn't a demand. I am sure you have chosen, as I have.'

'Let us wait a little, Joseph.'

'No, we haven't the time.'

'We are not old.'

'I mean that we will not be more sure in two weeks or two months than we are now, and we don't have two weeks or months to find out.'

'You are firmer and more persuasive than I thought, Joseph, and I am glad you are. I don't intend to promise—yet—but I would very much like you to come.'

'Very well, but Maggie, darling, remember what I said.'

She put down the telephone.

When she closed the door behind me, in her flat, she said :

'You are right, Joseph. Please, always be right.'

'I'll try,' I answered, and I was never to sleep in the flat of the young man who had so obligingly taken me in.

CHAPTER FIVE

The extraordinary thing about our lovemaking was the peacefulness, such as I had, in some degree, experienced with Ted, but whereas that had been a departure, this was a homecoming. Then, unconsciously, I had wanted to lose

myself in love, now I was found. And I thought of Anna, the other woman who had loved me. She had given me the basis on which this peace was founded, and I said a silent 'thank you' to her, wherever she might be.

Maggie had, she has, large firm breasts, slender fragile arms, a tiny delicate waist, an indescribably sensual, undulating walk. There is always one physical defect in the most perfect specimen, and hers is the faint down of black hair which covers her forearms, otherwise she is exquisite. She has a tiny mole on her left eyelid. I longed to be that mole, I was jealous of it—for it is a part of her very self which can never be separated from her—until the moment of my first orgasm with her, which she drew from every pore in my body, and it was as though I were reborn.

At that moment, I felt no guilt towards Dachs. A human being who is living his own life, who is doing what he alone was meant to do, does not feel guilt, for he is not guilty, he is enhancing the whole of life, including that of people who think they have rights over him which he is not fulfilling. I had abandoned Dachs, but not to nothing. The doctors said he would completely recover, and everything in his world which wished to be, or could not avoid being, conquered, he had conquered, only I had eluded him, and I knew that he would place my recapture above almost everything else just because I had eluded him, but I did not intend to be recaptured.

Now, I could not understand how it was that I had given Dachs the right to tell me where I should go, who I should see, what I should do. It was true that he had published my books, but I could not believe that gave him the right to dictate my whole way of life. I was not against the working arrangement, he understood what I was trying to say in my books and I wanted him to publish them if he wished to do so, and I could see that, in his way, he did sometimes succeed in furthering the cause of art, but I had to live my own life.

For some time, Maggie and I lived in harmony. I had never before had a woman who was entirely mine, as she was then, and I experienced for the first time the apparent access of strength which comes from possession of the rightful sexual object. I believe now that it is a necessary experience, that without it we can hardly become ourselves, but it is the experience which is necessary and not the possession, for in truth we possess nothing, our possessions are merely loans.

this same experience would seem equally necessary to a woman. But at that time we were object and subject to each other, we gloried in our youth, our beauty, our strength, our happiness; we went everywhere together, we saw everything together, and we wanted never to be apart. Her fear seemed to have gone.

When I suggested to her that we get married, she looked long and seriously at me. I knew then that, mad though it might be, she would marry me, but the fear was still there behind those lovely eyes, something which did not quite trust itself to fate.

'What about Dachs?' she asked.

She had not mentioned him since we had been living together, although I had gone to see him every day. He was conscious, but heavily sedated, and while he seemed pleased to see me, he had not said very much. For the moment, he need not exist for us, and as to later, we should have to wait and see. .

'He can't prevent me from marrying you, or from doing anything I please,' I answered.

'He'll try.'

'What *can* he do?'

'You know him better than anyone, Joseph. You know, if anyone does, just what he might do. I know that you have changed, the way you make love to me proves it, but his jealousy, his anger—'

'I'll just tell him that the old relationship is over. We can still work together, but I must have you.'

'He'll never accept it.'

'I'll talk to him. I'll tell him as soon as he's recovered.'

'No. Joseph, do you really want to marry me? Perhaps it's just the sex.'

'I mean it. I always know immediately what something or someone means to me, and I did with you. Will you marry me?'

'Yes, Joseph.'

I lay my body on top of hers, and kissed her. It seemed to me then that we were at one with all living things, and thus we were married in spirit and in flesh. Then she said :

'Marry me, Joseph, while he's still sick.'

Dachs recovered strength before Maggie and I could be married, although he was still confined to bed. I went to see him, taking some flowers, which he ignored, and I said :

'You're going to recover completely, the doctor says so, but you must try to take it easy.'

He did not reply, but searched my face with his eyes, and I was sure he read there all that had happened to me while he had been ill.

'You should have been here, all the time,' he said.

'Please don't be unreasonable, Dachs,' I replied. 'What would have been the point? You were unconscious, then hardly articulate.'

'Nevertheless, you should have been here.'

'If you continue to behave like this, I shall leave,' I threatened.

He gave me a look of hate, then said :

'I suppose you've taken the opportunity to break loose while I have been lying here helpless. Well, you will soon see that you can't live without me.'

'Dachs, please don't speak like this,' I began, but both of us knew that something was finished, without a word he knew that I had changed, and just how I had changed, and I realised that he had always known it would happen I wanted to tell him about Maggie, but she had warned me against it and she had been right. I felt guilty towards him, no longer for having deserted him when he was sick but for never having loved him. He never loved anyone, but he could get away with it in his own eyes because he did not believe in love, of what he had to give he had denied me nothing, whereas I, by not loving him, had denied him what I had given to others and was giving to Maggie.

'Well,' he said, more calmly 'Now that you are here, there are one or two things I should like you to do for me, they won't take more than a day or two –'

'Dachs,' I interrupted, 'I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the great help you have given me, and to—'

'When someone says that,' he said 'it means either that he is recovering from a severe illness, or he is saying goodbye, and it is I and not you who have been ill.'

'Not goodbye, Dachs, I hope always to be your friend.'

'Friend!' he spat out the word. 'I've given you more than friendship. I warn you, Joseph, I made you, I can break you!'

'I don't believe that, Dachs,' I said, but I was afraid that he could. 'Goodbye for the moment' And ignoring his command : 'Come back here!' I walked out.

CHAPTER SIX

I was far more perturbed by Dachs' remark that he had made me than by his threat to break me. It is difficult for one person to ruin a literary reputation, even if that person is very influential and even if, as with mine, that reputation is not very great, because he is then competing with the author for influence over many minds, and the author has an inevitable advantage in respect of those who follow him. But that I might have used Dachs was another matter. I had been unknown when I met him and through him I had had my books published and, to some extent, accepted. I had neither gone to him nor stayed with him for this reason but I had been fascinated by him, by the electric power which I associated especially with the contact of his naked body and which was present in all he did and even in all he possessed. I had been drawn to him as the moth to the flame and while I had not yet been burned I had not, until now, examined the nature of that flame. He was the quintessence of success, and the light by which he shone was not the light which was his from birth but a reflection of the world's light as the night sky glows crimson over London by the reflected radiance of that city's million lamps The power I had succumbed to, had even worshipped, in Dachs, was the power of the world, which in my heart I despised; I had been seduced, not really by him, but by the world. If I had used him, it had been to gain that which I had not been able to resist, but which I did not value; I had been corrupted, and this knowledge was more painful to me than the fear of anything that Dachs might do.

I did not confess my pain to Maggie, for it was the past, I determined to put behind me, and I wanted her to be happy on her wedding day.

We did not, of course, invite Dachs to the wedding, he would not have come if we had. A few minutes at the local register office, and it was done. I was happy and I was afraid, for I was not sure whether I could manage without Dachs, and I had Maggie to take care of. I had never handled my own financial affairs as an author, I had had nothing to do for two years except to write my books I wrote to Dachs, telling him of the marriage and asking for

not reply, but later I heard of the extraordinary scene which occurred when he read the letter. He cursed and raved and swore that he would kill me. He got out of bed and tried to smash the furniture. The frightened nurse ran for the doctor, and when he came, Dachs was dressing. The doctor tried to stop him and Dachs lifted up a chair to hit him with but collapsed, unconscious to the floor. But at the time I did not know this. I waited for his reply because I wanted him to say he would still be my friend, that I had not hurt him beyond endurance, and I also wished to sort out our financial arrangements. Dachs had taken most of the money from my books, I imagined it must amount to a considerable sum and now I needed it, for I had no other income nor any other money. Meanwhile, we lived on Maggie's income, inherited from her family, but I did not want to be dependent on her and I knew that she did not want it either, although she said nothing. But no word came from Dachs.

Then I heard that he had recovered and was active once more, and that he was telling everyone I had married Maggie because I was finished as a writer and needed someone to support me. This hurt me bitterly, it was not true and Dachs knew it was not. I had married Maggie because there was nothing else our relationship could have been but marriage, although while I had no money she was supporting me. I had not been financially dependent on Dachs, although he had made it seem as though I had, and I was, temporarily, dependent on Maggie, but this did not appear to me to matter because we loved. Self-dependence, highly prized in our world, is ultimately impossible; we are, in fact, all interdependent, but people do not always recognise this and a marriage is often looked upon as the dependence of a woman on a man, simply because the money is usually the man's, although needs are mutual. I wished to share everything with Maggie and I accepted that she would share what she had with me. As soon as it became possible, and I had money to share, I intended that we should live mutually in this respect too.

We had lived, for a time, in Maggie's flat. I had told her everything, including the story of my financial arrangement with Dachs. She said that he was cheating me and that I should sue him for my money. I did not want to do this, I did not believe that he was cheating me, in fact, I knew he was not, for I had agreed to the arrangement and had not

to change it. Also, I believed it was possible that he, too, needed the money, and I saw no reason to hurt him or his ventures financially if it could be avoided, for he had always been materially generous and I had been the one to change and not him.

During this time, while I was deliberating what to do, Maggie came across a house which was for sale, which she wanted to buy. It was quite a large and expensive Regency house which had, in its early days, belonged to a famous poet, and then to a painter. When I heard of it, I was instinctively against such a purchase. To own property, especially such elegant property which had always belonged to the rich, even if they had been artists, would make us bourgeoise. I had had to break away from Dachs, partly because I did not wish to own or to be owned; I wanted to be poor. Now I was poor, and nothing would seem simpler than to remain so, but with Maggie I could not be poor, I had chosen her and all that went with her and I could not imagine, at that time, that she would ever choose poverty. Some people have the aura of riches and plenty about them, gained from their early years, and Maggie was such a person. Ideally, I should have liked her to retain her richness without being rich, even to give her money away, for it seemed to me that this is one of the secrets of life, but it could not be until I had at least some money, meanwhile we had to live as she wished and could afford to live. But when I saw the house, I wanted it, it was perfect for our needs, and I did not try to prevent Maggie from buying it. The enormous round studio we used as our living room, and I had a lovely square room on the first floor to be my study.

I needed an income if we were to maintain ourselves there. I suspect that Maggie bought it partly as a means of forcing me to realise the need for doing something definite about money, and from her point of view I cannot blame her for that. For the first few weeks, we were wonderfully happy.

Then I wrote to Dachs once again, asking him as a friend to let me have my money, and telling him that I should like to see him. He did not reply, and Maggie demanded that I go to a lawyer. Reluctantly, I went. The lawyer wrote to him, and I received a remarkable letter in reply. The gist of it was that he, Dachs, was astounded that I should wish to ruin him by going to law after all that he had done for me, but that he had realised that it was not really I who wished

provocation, was behaving as an enemy. He had no right to keep anything of mine but he reminded me that I had not only been very willing for him to take care of my financial affairs, maintaining of my own free will that I could not take care of them myself, but that my aims had been the same as his own, and the spending of money on artistic ventures had been a joint matter which had not, as between friends, needed anything as sordid as a legal contract. However, if I was as badly in need of money as my lawyer maintained, he was willing to supply me with an income out of his own private monies, for the time being, until he could arrange for whatever was due to me, which he thought could hardly be very much, to be disentangled from the joint finances, when I could arrange to pay him back, or else if I were to write other books, and he should very much like to see me begin to do so, perhaps something might be paid back to him out of the money earned by these, but of course he would not be in a hurry to receive repayment. He ended by regretting that, after all we had meant to each other, I should have shown my gratitude for friendship by turning against him.

The letter made me feel guilty, as no doubt it was intended to do. His analysis was quite true, and his offer about the money seemed to suggest that he still wanted to be my publisher. It was perhaps an attempt to keep me ensnared but it could also be construed as a generous offer on the part of a former friend and partner. Once again he had confused me, and I could only think that I would try to insist that any money he gave to me was money of my own, and I hoped that, in this circumstance, he would still be willing to publish my work.

When I showed the letter to Maggie, she was furious. She was sure that he was intending to cheat me again, but this time he would not get away with it for he would have to reckon with her. I was glad she was not afraid of him, but I should have liked to avoid a clash between them, for I still hoped for a friendship. She persuaded me, against my will, to go to the lawyer once again, and Maggie and he agreed that a reply should be sent to Dachs, telling him that he must meet the three of us or we would sue, immediately. To their surprise, he did not object.

But he did make conditions. He insisted on meeting us in a room in a huge hotel, the kind of gigantic room of which he

purpose. This made Maggie even more angry, but there was nothing we could do about it, and I did not think it really mattered, what mattered was that we should reach agreement and not quarrel. I asked Maggie to let me go on my own, and to let me speak to him for at least a few minutes before she came. At first she was unwilling, saying that he would try to turn me against her, but when I assured her that he could never do that because I loved her and had never loved him, she agreed.

I was shocked when I saw him, he had aged ten years. Now, for the first time, he looked older than he was. And yet, as he held out his hand to me with a smile, perhaps because he was wearing a white suit now as he had done then, I was immediately taken back to that evening when I had first gone to see him. I vividly recalled the excitement, the apprehension, the curiosity, all of which had proved amply justified by his personality and his surroundings. I did not really want to look at him, for fear that, once again, I should be blinded, and yet when I did, I found him to be a severe man showing his years, for whose body I felt a tenderness born of long familiarity, and who still had the power to excite me beyond endurance, but in a way I no longer wanted. He watched me observe him, although he said nothing but the usual politenesses, asking whether I was well and what I was doing. I told him that while I remembered the old days not without pleasure, I was happy with Maggie and only regretted that the three of us could not be friends.

I soon realised that he was merely passing the time with me, it was Maggie he wished to see, and hear, for he was convinced that she was the one he had to defeat, that I was obeying her will. It was true, as he knew well enough, that I would not have instigated legal proceedings, but he did not comprehend that it was I who had chosen Maggie as well as she who had chosen me. He had known that I would leave him but he could not accept it as something inevitable, it had to be the work of an enemy, of Maggie. I knew that he would try to get me back, given his nature he could not do otherwise, but I determined to say what had to be said and to stand by my choice and my wife.

Maggie looked superb as she entered, in a low-cut dress which showed off her magnificent figure, but of course it was the wrong kind of impression to make on Dachs, he was

the seat he was sitting on, behind an enormous desk at the end of the vast room, and presented Maggie with his back. She said:

'Mr Dachs, if you do not turn round to face me in the usual civilised manner, I do not think my husband will let me stay here, and we will be obliged to take the matter straight to court.'

Slowly Dachs swung his chair round to face her. Although he had always been subject to gigantic rages I had never before seen him look as angry as he did then. For a moment I thought he would erupt and attack Maggie, and I moved between her and him. The tension was almost unbearable, and then he broke it by saying:

'Madame, whether you stay or go is your own affair and entirely immaterial to me. It was you who asked for this meeting and not I. But it seems to me now and has seemed to me since I heard of you that all you are interested in is money.'

'Mr. Dachs,' replied Maggie, unperturbed. 'Even if that were true, and you are hardly in a position to know whether it is or not, the point at issue is that the money belongs to my husband and you refuse to give it to him.'

'You are mad,' he replied, quite calmly. He turned to me. 'Have you shown her the letter I sent you? Did I refuse, did I not offer you an income out of my own private resources?'

'Rubbish!' Maggie was so angry she was almost shouting. 'We want *our* money, not yours!'

Dachs was breathing heavily, as he always did when he was angry and trying to control himself. I was afraid that this would make him ill again, but I was also angry at his treatment of Maggie. I could feel what both of them were feeling. I wished I had not agreed, that I had not come and let the money be forgotten, but now I was here I would try to reconcile us all.

'Dachs, you did offer me an income, and that was generous, but Maggie is right, I want my own money. What has happened, we were friends for years, inseparable? Can't you see that we need the money, that I can't take part any more in ventures which need what I need for living, money which *I* earned by *my* work?'

Dachs rose from his seat. He was a large man, a commanding figure, and at that moment he looked terrifying.

of. You ask me what has changed, you ask me what is the matter. The matter, Joseph, is passion. Yes, passion! I can freely admit my passion for you because you cannot deny that you responded to it, for two whole years. I doubt whether you understand passion, Joseph. This—creature' he pointed at Maggie 'thinks she can take you away from me—*me*! But, although we all know she is not as frail as she looks, not nearly so frail, she is far more frail than I. She cannot take you from me. And you, Joseph, cannot leave me, because you need me, to live, to breathe. Have you written one word since you left me for her? Tell me, Joseph, where is the great artist I was always so sure you would become?' Then he slumped into his chair, and stared almost vacantly out of a window.

I began to say something, I don't remember what, when the lawyer, who had so far been standing silently by Maggie with an expression of growing consternation on his face, gestured me to be silent and broke in :

'Mr. Dachs, your private emotions are no doubt very interesting, but as my client said, we are here to discuss the money which it is claimed you are witholding. Are you prepared to make a settlement, or are we obliged to go to law? This is all we wish to know.'

Dachs remained silent for almost a minute, then he turned his head to the lawyer and said :

'Go to the devil!'

The lawyer turned to Maggie and shrugged his shoulders. Maggie said to me :

'Joseph, there is no need to degrade ourselves by talking to this man any longer. Are you satisfied now that we were wrong not to have gone to law months ago?'

'Dachs,' I burst out, 'what you have just said is madness! I love Maggie, she is my wife, she hasn't taken me from you, I chose her. Can't we be friends now, as I always wanted, and simply work together?'

'You say you love her,' he answered. 'What can you do for her, Joseph? Haven't you had to come here, to beg for the money you don't really want to take, because you are forced to live off her, because you have to go to someone?'

I heard him in a kind of trance, but I did hear. If I had had to go to him, it was his doing, I thought. But I knew it not only his doing, it was also my own. The money was mine, but I had not loved him, and I could not blame

when I had not hesitated to finish with him the moment I found someone else I wanted more.

I felt humiliated, like a schoolboy again, like the one they called 'the shadow' because he was always to be seen trailing behind Dachs. He was right, I didn't really want to take the money from him. I believed in his activities, they had been *our* activities. If I had any other money or knew of any way to earn any I would not have come to him. But above all I wanted to be rid of this hatred. It seemed to me that not money nor any other material thing was worth it, although I knew it was not really money which had caused this, but, as Dachs had said, passion, or rather, possession, it was really possession itself which caused this terrible bitterness. The love I had felt for Maggie when first I made love to her, which I still felt, was not a possessive thing. Dachs was wrong about passion, it was selfishness he was talking about, and I wanted both Maggie and Dachs to let go of what they both considered was theirs and be gentle, and loving.

Maggie turned to me:

'You have only succeeded in letting him insult both of us.' She obviously expected me to say something but I could not, I was paralysed.

'Do you intend to let him continue? Perhaps, after all, you want to go back to him?'

'Maggie, how can you?'

'Very well. And surely now you can see you *have* to sue him?'

'No' I said. 'I don't want the money. We mustn't quarrel —I want peace, harmony – I can write more. I'll earn as much as you want.'

'Joseph – I didn't think you were a coward! If you love me, you'll leave with me, now, and do as I ask.'

Dachs burst out laughing, a laugh which expressed his contempt, and his triumph. I ran out of the door, down the stairs, and into the street.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I had to get away, at that moment, from both Maggie and Dachs, or I would have lost myself completely, but who was I? I had let Maggie believe that I was willing to meet Dachs to demand my rights, but really it was not so, I do not believe in rights, I had hoped that somehow I could make him see reason and when he did, that the three of us could be friends. I knew, no-one knew better, what Dachs was like, but there was in his character a great and generous side, I had known him to be generous in every way to artists he admired, and I had secretly hoped that the better part of his nature could be appealed to now that he was obliged to admit that I had chosen someone else. But I had failed. What Maggie had said, that I had succeeded only in letting him insult both of us, was true, and in the process I had alienated myself from Maggie's understanding. As I walked home through streets which were cold, grey and inhuman, I reflected that I had never before really thought about who I was, what I meant or wanted, I had merely reacted to people and circumstances, but for my books, and what were they? An incomplete story, a few words which formed the beginning of a poem, came into my head, and I shaped and completed them on paper to express something I felt at the time, that was all. They sometimes seemed when I wrote them to have immense significance, but really it was only the shadow of a significance that I was barely conscious of, because I had never tried to dig into the depths of myself and to write what I really believed. I had learned one fact about myself, that I was neither Dachs nor, and this was painful to realise, was I Maggie. It sounded absurd that I should ever have thought I was either of them, and I had not actually 'thought' so, but what else was I when I had identified my meaning and desires with theirs?

Maggie I loved, with an entirely masculine passion. My ideal of lovemaking with her was and had always been a poem of gratitude, yet there was something in me she feared, and I was beginning to fear her too; there had always been something missing from our relationship. As Dachs had remarked, I had not written a single line since my marriage, and Maggie had ceased to attend her art classes. She had

refused to show me any of her work, although I knew it was of great importance to her, and I had accepted this as an artist's right, and assumed that it was a period of getting to understand each other in which work would have been a distraction. But now the honeymoon was over, and working side by side would be a harmony in itself. I was neither Maggie nor Dachs, whatever it was they wanted I wanted peace between us and all men. And I would prove to Dachs and everyone else that I could live without him: by writing a better book than I had ever written while I lived with him. I would show that I had developed and grown, and that that relationship, had it continued any longer, would have held me back.

When I arrived home I went immediately to my study and shut myself in. I lay down on the couch and tried to think things out. I would not take Dachs to court, but I would try to forget him. Maggie, this house, my work, these were my life now, everything must be done here and through these people and things. I would tell Maggie that I was finished with Dachs, that we must forget about the money of mine which he had, if indeed there really was any left. Then, as though welling up from my whole life, an idea for a book came into my head, a daring idea which I hardly believed I would be able to realise. There are ideas which one carries in one's mind, sometimes consciously and sometimes not, for years, perhaps, in a certain way, for life. Such an idea is an expression of one's true attitude to life, which, with people who have an attitude of their own, and they are not very many, forms itself during the early years and does not radically change afterwards. The idea may get overlaid by other ideas, or may, with an artist, express itself superficially in a creative work, depending on factors which may not be within the artist's control, the circumstances of his life, how nearly he is able to approach his ideal of himself, but, in the depths, the true life of the idea continues, as the life of the earth continues beneath the city street, or as the teeming activity of the sea is always present beneath the sea although often no sign of it can be seen on the surface.

And now, perhaps by virtue of necessity, my innate idea burst forth into my conscious mind, as though what I really was had become summarised as a thought and that thought had become personalised as a character, the central personality of my new story. And by means of this book, what might I not be able to do? Perhaps to become Joseph as

much as Dachs was Dachs, or Maggie was Maggie, or more so. I needed only the time in which to write it, and perhaps I had that time, just a few months, and then—. I would keep it a secret, I should not tell even Maggie what it was I was working on, and I could begin just as soon as I had given to it the necessary minimum of mental activity.

I heard Maggie enter, but she did not come upstairs to see if I was in, nor did I go down to see her. It would be better, so I thought, if she had a little time to herself, in which she too could think, and perhaps understand.

When I finally went downstairs, I found, to my surprise, that Maggie was reading one of my books by the living room fire. She looked up as she heard me, and I said :

'Maggie, I'd like to speak to you.'

'Joseph,' she had obviously been expecting me. 'I won't go into your possible reasons for disloyalty this afternoon, but why—why did you have to play into Dachs' hands like that? The man is insane, and probably criminal. Did you mean what you said? Have you changed your mind about going to court?'

'The truth is, Maggie, that I never did intend to go to law—'

'You never did I don't understand. You say that Dachs has your money, and he laughs at us when we ask for it—how then do you expect to get it? Or is it that you are afraid of what might come out about—your relationship with him, for if it is, the lawyer says—'

'No, Maggie, I am not afraid. It's just that it won't achieve what I want even if I win.'

'What *do* you want, Joseph? You said you wanted me.'

'I married you.'

'Yes, but now we are married—and I don't regret we are—are you willing to give me what any wife is entitled to expect?'

'And what is that?'

'I want you to be independent, and to take care of me, that's all—or do *you* regret having exchanged Dachs for me?'

I was determined that from now on I would behave as calmly and reasonably as possible, especially with Maggie. I realised that she did not understand my motives and I wanted her to understand, and to accept even if she couldn't agree. What she was asking for was entirely reasonable, but I had to go about it in my own way. I could see that she did not really wish to assume rights over me, even if those

wanted what to her was a self-respecting life, but that the corner of fear which I had always known existed in her being led her into trying to force me. I did not want to demand rights over her, but I had to be understood, and I felt that the best way to try to achieve understanding was with reason, and patience, and love.

'I did not exchange Dachs for you, Maggie. As I have always said, I love you and I never did love Dachs.'

'Yet you let him control you then, and it seems that you still want him to now—Oh, it's too degrading, this competition with a *man*—a woman I could understand.'

'Maggie, that's just it, you don't understand, it isn't like that at all. Have I gone near him since we married? Have I in any way deceived you with him or anyone else? I don't *want* him!'

'Then why did you let him get away with—what he did get away with, this afternoon?'

'Because what he is "getting away with" I don't want, and so he is getting away with nothing.'

'You are evading the issue—'

'No. Look, Maggie, if he has any power over me, isn't it just that he is holding on to money which I believe belongs to me?'

'I'm—not sure. The money is what we want, but the real trouble is that you seem to agree with his point of view—'

'No—no I don't. I can *see* his point of view, and that is a different thing.'

'Oh, anyone can see what he is after.'

'I don't mean that. I can *understand* his viewpoint, but I don't *agree* with it. But what matters is not what he thinks but what we want, and if he doesn't want to see reason and give me what is mine, presuming I am right and that he really has my money, then I don't want to force him, that's *his* method, not mine.'

'Then what will we do when my money runs out, which it will do eventually?'

'I'm—going to write another book—a better book than the one you are reading, than any I've written until now—'

'Oh Joseph, I'm glad, very glad. *This* book is very, very good, you know. Dachs is right, you'll be a great writer. But—and I really must say this, Joseph—I wonder if, in your understandable ignorance of money matters, you haven't always exaggerated the amount of money your books have

many books *do* earn much money, and sometimes the better the book the less money it earns? I know I don't know much about these things, but—well, there is *one* thing I have in common with Dachs. He and I both like the good things of life, luxury, I mean, but you don't Joseph, you are an aesthetic really, and whereas I enjoy rare foods, beautiful jewellery, lovely clothes—'

'And you can wear them better than anyone.'

'Thank you Joseph –but what I was trying to say was, you love me now, but perhaps you will come to hate me for forcing you to work for things for which you have no use, in your heart—'

I was longing to say to her that she needed nothing to enhance her beauty or her enjoyment of life, that she could abandon this taste for luxury and be free of all it implied, but it was not yet time to do so, I had to be capable of supporting her first, and I answered :

'You are not forcing me, and I shall work for both of us, for the life we have together.'

'Joseph, I want you to be honest.'

'And I want to be, more than anything.'

'Well then, you love me physically, yes. I know I am beautiful, but do you love me, do you even know me, as a person?'

'The truth is, Maggie, I love you, really love you, and I begin to understand you, but I don't entirely approve of what I understand, and the worst thing is that I feel –you do not understand me.'

'No, how could I, you are very complicated, and perhaps I am not capable of it.'

I fell on my knees beside her.

'Just love, Maggie, love, that's all.'

'I'll try,' she replied, but fear showed in her wonderful eyes.

CHAPTER EIGHT

That night I did not leave my study to sleep with Maggie in our bedroom, as I had always done before. At midnight, she came upstairs and found me sitting at my desk—I had begun to work.

'It's late, Joseph. Come to bed.'

'I'll come later,' I said, 'you go to sleep. If it's very late

We had never slept apart, not since we married. I knew that she liked sleeping with me, but I had not thought it would make any difference to her if, for one night, we slept in different beds.

'You don't love me any more.'

'That's not true,' I replied. 'I just want to finish the outline of my story, then I can begin the first chapter tomorrow.'

'Is this what it's going to be like?'

'What do you mean?'

'You working till the early hours, sleeping in a separate bed—you won't be mine any more.'

'I have to work, Maggie.'

'Yes, but what's to become of our life in the process, if your work has to dictate our way of living?'

'Every person's work dictates his way of living to a certain extent, Maggie. We've been lucky until now, being able to live as we pleased, but how long could we go on like that? You want me to write.'

'Yes, but I also want to have a reasonable life.'

'You go to bed, Maggie. I shan't be long.'

She went, but I felt her resentment that I should, out of concern for my work, cease to concentrate on her, even that I should be able to tell her to go to bed. I was sure it was not that she wished to be selfish, but a man who is creating, who is producing out of himself, has an inwardness which some women feel to be their prerogative alone, for it is they who bear life, within them, and this is a function which they feel a man has no right to usurp.

The distrust which had always been incipiently present in our relations had emerged into a reality. It was the very opposite of what I wished to happen but I could not do anything about it, I was caught. It was not possible for me to abandon my book now that I had begun, even if I wanted to, and I could not keep what Maggie thought was reasonable hours because I wished to show spontaneity both by my actions and in my story.

I could not explain to Maggie what I was trying to do. The delicate mechanism which is the substratum of a work of art ought not to be laid bare whilst the work is in process, not to anyone, because then the artist is obliged to be more conscious of the process than is desirable or necessary, the subtle interplay between layers of the mind which is

tion released by the artist, and travelling through him, it may become rigid, and die. But I would behave as calmly and lovingly as I could towards her, and when the book was finished I was sure she would understand.

But it was to be a long journey to the end of this book. I based my hopes upon it in a way that was different from anything I had written previously. I trembled every time I sat down to work, and at first I distracted myself by drawing people and animals on the paper in front of me, sometimes for hours, before I could manage to write a word. If it was during the day, I could look out of the window at what was always a sad, and sometimes a beautiful view. I could see only the backs of offices and other tall buildings. Such a concentration of people must have existed there but hardly anyone was ever to be seen. There was a woman, always dressed in pink and black, whom I could see every weekday through one of the windows, either sitting at a desk, sometimes telephoning, or powdering her face. She never seemed to do any work, and she was always alone. I could not see what she looked like except that she was not young, and I made up a life for her, such as I imagine many people lead, with a husband, children, a suburban house, and just to add a touch of the exotic, I gave her a parrot, green and yellow. I suspected that she was, in reality, complacent, I don't know why, but in my imagination I made her sad, like the view.

'Joseph, Joseph,' I seemed to hear her say.

'You too will grow beyond your youth, as I have done, you too will watch the seasons pass, the shining April and the dark November. Now, you do not know how you go, you burn to open the eyes of all the world. But the time will come when time itself will take you, when with the changing rhythm of the year you too will change, and grow, and come to dust. Have patience, Joseph, wait and work, and before you are taken by the unknown stranger across to the land where there is no change, where all remains the same, for ever, you will arrive, and be glad, and look with calm eyes upon the tragic fall of life, to do what can be done and leave the rest, as I do.'

This was how I imagined that she spoke to me, and I felt comforted.

Sometimes, in the evening, the sky was streaked with crimson and the outlines of the raw buildings softened with

the inexpressible, and then, even if I had been sitting for most of the day without working, I could write

I had always written carelessly and easily before, but now I did not quite know what to do, I needed help, but there was no-one to give it to me.

One day, while I was sitting unable to write, I had a vision of the mass of mankind leading muted oppressed lives, having been overcome by their own immense constructions, being imprisoned in number, amount, the sheer size and scope of their own achievements. I longed to help release everyone from this burden but I did not know how to do it. It was only by means of my writing that I felt I could do anything, and I persisted Slowly the words began to come from a greater depth, with their own direction, and the meaning I was searching for began to create itself.

Thus I achieved a concentration by means of which I could, at times, isolate myself completely from my environment, including, of course, Maggie. She began to hate it, and I, a jealous guardian of my solitary devotions, developed the habit of a self-protection in which I did not believe.

Maggie often wanted me to go with her to the functions, the first-nights, the social gatherings, which she was in the habit of attending, but almost always I refused I had led such a life with Dachs, and as I had then been accompanying him on his occasions, and had always been shy, I had had much time to observe, and I grew to hate what I saw. The insincerity of these gatherings, which people attend mainly to flatter or destroy, or else to fritter away their time which will never come again, disgusted me, and now that I was writing from my depths about matters which I valued, I was afraid of their influence. To write well, one needs to be open and sensitive, even sensitised A sincere flow of feeling between human beings helps to preserve this sensitivity and openness, but hypocrisy and superficial contact with people and things destroys it. Social life and artistic creation should feed each other, but I suspect that now, true artists spend much time protecting their solitude from the depredations of social intercourse, for which they also long. Now I had achieved a pure concentration, I clung to it, and when Maggie argued, or begged that I go with her, I either shook my head and shut my study door, or said that it was more beneficial to get on with one's work.

to a party with someone else, a man she had known before we married, whom I had never met. She said she wanted me to meet him and would like to bring him home when the party was over. The ancient questions rose in my mind. How long had she known him? Had he been her lover? Did he love her? In what way did she like him? But I suppressed their expression. I would not stoop to jealousy even if it were less crude than Dachs' kind. I had suffered too much from that kind of thing myself to inflict it on another, and I merely said that of course I did not mind, and that I should be pleased to meet any friend of Maggie's. She kissed me rather doubtfully on the cheek before she left, more carefully dressed, more lovely and polished than was usual even for her.

It was the first really insincere thing I had said to Maggie. I already disliked this man in the usual masculine fashion, but I did not like myself for the feeling. What would I do if she took a lover? I realised that, if it were someone I liked, if she were even to leave me for someone else whom I approved of, if she genuinely loved him I would do all I could to help them. But if I did not approve? It was this which worried me, even tormented me, and I waited for Maggie to return with her friend with great impatience. She was a very desirable woman, and I could hardly believe that her friend, whoever he was, did not want her physically.

I heard her laugh, that wonderful musical laugh, and a man's voice, and I left my room to greet them. Maggie glanced up, as she saw me at the top of the stairs, then deliberately kissed the man on the mouth. So it is a scheme to make me jealous, I thought, and returned at once to my room and shut the door.

'Aren't you coming to say hullo, darling?' Maggie called out, but I did not answer. I closed myself in, determined not to react; I would not play this kind of game. I heard more laughter from downstairs, then, after a while, silence.

I spent the rest of the night thinking. Had I allowed myself to dwell on it, my peace of mind would have been gone. I no longer knew whether I could trust Maggie sexually but, as I thought of it, something else seemed to matter more. I adored her face and body, they were beautiful, but this was an accident of flesh and senses. What I had come to care about was what she had doubted if I was aware of, the person she was. It seemed to me that there was a

come afraid, of me, of our way of life, even of my writing. I could not tell her what I felt because I too was afraid, that somehow she would rob me of my solitude, and therefore of my book, and this I would not let her do. But she was of vital importance to my book and, I was sure, my book was to her. How could I keep her reasonably content, at least, just until I had finished what I was doing? I decided to ignore, if possible, the incident of the kiss, not to let her achieve her manifest object, and to encourage her along a more constructive path. But what if this man was her lover? I forced myself to ignore this question, for I felt that that way would lead to madness.

The next morning I went down early to breakfast, weary from not having slept, and as I passed the bedroom door the thought entered my mind that the man might have stayed the night, he might have made love to Maggie in our bed, but I could not believe this of her and would not allow myself to think of it.

Maggie was already eating her breakfast, much earlier than was usual for her. She looked up at me and said:

'Why didn't you come down last night, there was no need to be rude to my friend?'

I ignored her question, the hypocrisy of which hurt me, and I said:

'I've been thinking, Maggie. Why don't you begin to paint again?'

'Well, so you are interested in me, after all!'

'Of course I am, Maggie. I have never stopped being interested in you, it's just that I'm busy.'

'Oh yes, the book,' she sounded bitter. 'How is it going?'

'Quite well.'

'Is it seditious, or obscene?'

'Why do you ask?'

'There must be a reason why you keep it such a secret.'

'I'd rather show it to you when it is finished.'

'Supposing I say I don't believe you do anything when you're shut away up there?'

'Then you would be wrong. But you haven't answered my question.'

'You haven't had time to notice but I *have* been painting.'

'That's wonderful! Have you anything I can see? Where is it?'

'That's silly, you know I do.'

'Very well, come along now, I'll show you.'

She led me to the attic, which, to my surprise, I saw she had converted into a studio. She must have been busier than I had thought, and I turned to her and said :

'I misjudged you, Maggie, I apologise.'

There was a painting, obviously a self-portrait, on the easel.

'Well, here it is. What do you think of it?'

I looked at it for a time, then I said :

'Do you really want to know what I think?'

'You mean you don't like it?'

'No –but I always try to tell the truth about art, there is no point in lying.'

'And the truth is?'

'That I quite like it, but it is not quite precise enough. You have talent, but you need to work a great deal harder yet.'

'Thank you, sir, for those few unkind, astringent words!' she said bitterly. 'Other people think my work *is* good enough as it is! Could it be that you are jealous?'

'I'm not jealous, and I am not other people!'

'No, you certainly are not! I think perhaps I have given *you* too much admiration!' and she strode out of the room.

I followed her down until we were outside my room.

'Maggie, you mustn't think—'

She turned to face me.

'You are an insufferable, inhuman monster!' she began. 'The master skulks in his room producing the masterpiece he dare not show to anyone, and I get slapped in the face for showing him *my* work!' She was almost screaming at me, and in order not to hear I put my hands over my ears, but I could still hear her say :

'What do you need a woman *for*? You could have stayed with Dachs!' and she tried to pull my hands away from my head.

How it happened I do not really know, but when I heard the word 'Dachs' I began to tremble and instinctively tried to push her away. I felt hemmed in by her, trapped, and perhaps I was trying to ward off the feeling, but when I looked, she had fallen down the stairs, and I realised I had pushed her. I stood there, shocked at what I had done. She

shaken and white-faced.

'You're mad!' She hurled the words, then went into the bedroom and slammed the door after her.

CHAPTER NINE

It was because of this incident that Tom moved into the house. Later that same day, Maggie, unusually subdued and quiet, came into my room.

'I didn't mean to hurt you,' I began.

'Let us not talk about it, Joseph,' she said. 'There is something else I've come to say.'

I listened apprehensively.

'My mother's family,' she began, 'are not English, as you know, despite what I look like, and in the Continental, aristocratic manner, the women of the family have mostly taken lovers.'

I heard her with a sinking heart, but I listened in silence.

'My mother had a lover, I knew him, but of course she was what her generation called 'discreet', she kept him carefully hidden, but I prefer to call that hypocritical. Joseph, did you see the man I brought here last night?'

'No, I did not.'

'Oh—well, he is not now, but, before I met you, he was my lover. I wish to take him as my lover again and have him live here, in this house.'

'You mean, you are asking me to leave?'

'No I want the three of us to live here.'

'Oh, Maggie, must you ask this?'

'You seem to be more—specific in your sexual desires than I am, Joseph. I could have remained faithful to you, but you are neglecting me, and I no longer wish to be faithful. I am not sure if I still love you, that we shall have to see, but I am very fond of Tom, and I must have someone who will give me a great deal of attention. I cannot bear to have other men as escorts when you refuse to accompany me, it would not be wholesome, I prefer an established friend, and no secrecy.'

'And if I say no?'

'Then I shall have to leave you.'

She knew that I did not want her to leave, that I still

posed, I determined to act on what I had thought out. If I liked her friend Tom, and she wanted him, I would not object. I felt that no-one has the right to make anyone else do anything they do not wish to do, nor to prevent them from doing what they want, but if I could help it I would not let her hurt me in ways that cut across what I believed in.

'Why, Maggie?'

'Why should I be married if I cannot sleep with a man every night, if my husband is too busy with his work to accompany me socially or, often, to make love to me?'

I could understand her point of view, but as she said, my desires were specific, while I loved Maggie I wanted no-one else, but she was not the same, and I saw no way of making a compromise.

'Very well,' I agreed, 'let him live here. But if the arrangement is not a success, we will have to change it.'

'Oh, it will be all right, you'll see. I'm glad you don't have any outdated concept of honour, at least that is in your favour.' And she left the room.

She was right, I do not believe in honour, my social-sexual reputation means nothing to me, but nonetheless the idea of this new arrangement was profoundly disturbing, for while I could see that it might give me the freedom I needed if I were to finish my book, and I could see the justice of Maggie's point of view, I did not wish to share her, and my security in the relationship was gone.

CHAPTER TEN

Maggie was awakened by the sunshine streaming in on her face. She was about to say 'Joseph' when she saw that it was Tom's tousled head lying on the pillow next to her. She half-smiled. This arrangement, in a sense pleased her, gave her a feeling of power over men, but she felt a little guilty about it too. She knew perfectly well that it must hurt Joseph, these monogamous natures can be unconventional and immoral in the eyes of the world but their own strictly puritan code prevented them from straying from what they fondly imagined was the path of love. Love! What was that, desired by all men and women but inter-

Joseph, sufficiently so to take him from a man—ugh, how the thought of that still humiliated her! and to marry him despite the fact that he hadn't a penny they could use. And yet she also knew that she loved him, not for himself, but for his beautiful body, a truly beautiful body, and for his talent. She had wanted him for more than just an affair because she believed in his work. His books had a light lyrical flow which she knew her painting could never achieve, which was in direct contrast with his personality and which had something of springtime and the morning of life in it. He was already known, and that he would be a great success she did not doubt. She wanted to be a part of this success but she knew that she had not the ability to help him with his work, not the knowledge of writing nor the human insight to help him as a person. Dachs had, apparently, left him to write, then appeared just when his work was over for the day, but she could not do this, it would mean thinking of him all the time and she cared too much for herself to think that much of any man. No, she wanted him just to be hers, to give himself to her in the evenings when his day's writing was done, but instead he had become taciturn, unpredictable, almost frightening, since beginning this mysterious book. Why did he have to keep it such a secret? Was it about her, something he didn't want her to know he was doing because it revealed what he really thought about her? She had captured him physically, she knew, but she could never be sure about men, they were liable to swear eternal love while they were making love, and to hate one as soon as the act of love was over. If only she were a girl again, in the country where she had been brought up! Although no-one would think so now, she had been athletic and simple, riding ponies and playing hockey. She remembered the time she had seen her horse Daisy being served by a stallion. She had not believed what happened until she saw it for herself, but it had been so simple, even though the stallion had had to be helped. Life had flowed on the country estate, everyone had known their place, and while she now realised that she had always been privileged, and that this was merely an accident of birth and in no way justified, when her present life seemed too complex she longed for those privileged days of childhood to return again.

Watching Tom's sleeping head she thought again of Joseph. She *would* know what he was hiding from her, for

Tom and Joseph. Tom suited her better as a lover because he was more complaisant, Joseph was really more of a man even though he and Dachs—How strange that was, everyone seemed to have this kind of thing wrong, and what made a man a man was as mysterious as what made life live. But Tom was sweet, very sweet. He opened his eyes :

'Good morning, Maggie.'

'Hi, Tom,' she whispered.

He felt her look, and his flesh rose.

'Do you want me, Maggie?' he asked politely. It went through her head that Joseph never asked.

'Yes please, Tom,' she whispered and he drew himself towards her.

Afterwards, she said :

'Where were you yesterday afternoon, Tom? I wanted you to come for a walk, but I couldn't find you.'

'With Joseph.'

'Oh—where?'

'In his room.'

'In his room! Did he invite you in?'

'Yes. He seems to like me. He's a funny chap, very shy, but he's all right.'

'How do you mean—all right?'

'Oh, some people are all right, and some are all wrong, you know.'

'You don't think he's—mad?'

'Mad? Good heavens no! Why?'

'Well—he did push me downstairs.'

'Yes, poor Maggie. I think it must have been an accident, he doesn't seem the type to use violence on a woman, and he's—fond of you.'

'Did he say so? What did he say?'

'Well he didn't exactly say so, but he said that he was glad the three of us could be friends, or at least live peaceably together.'

'Peaceably! I shouldn't have thought that meant he was fond of me, unless it was like a sister, I should have thought that if he loved me as a wife he would be—jealous.'

'You'll have to face it Maggie, he isn't.'

'Then perhaps he doesn't love me.'

'Look Maggie, you say you want a civilised arrangement —now it seems it's too civilised.'

'Don't *you* think it's funny if he is not jealous at all?'

'Don't defend him, Tom, he's hurt me a lot.'

'People always hurt each other, Maggie, it's part of the game.'

'What game?'

'Life. You shouldn't hold it against him if he didn't do as you expected him to. After all, think of his past, give him time, let him finish his book.'

'His book—did he tell you about it?'

'Some.'

'What? Tell me Tom, I must know!'

'He said it was better, and deeper, than anything he's written before.'

'Oh, that—he said that to me—anything else? Didn't he tell you what it's about?'

'He said it would be—very important for you.'

'I thought so! So he *is* writing about me!'

'That wasn't really what he said, Maggie.'

'What else could he have meant? Of course it's about me!'

'It was more that he meant it *for* you.'

'For me, about me. Tom, will you help me?'

'How?'

'Get it for me. Take it somehow, take his notebooks—let me see them.'

'No, Maggie. If he wanted you to see them, he would show them to you.'

'You don't love me either.'

'Yes I do, I wouldn't be here if I didn't. I don't care if it's another man's bed. I'm no moralist, but I like Joseph.'

'You're just like him, Tom.'

'How do you mean?'

'Oh, you're a puritan at heart. But perhaps all men are.'

'Do you really believe it would prove that I love you if I steal Joseph's notebooks for you?'

'I didn't say steal, Tom. Borrow, just borrow. Well, it's the first thing I've asked of you.'

'Why must you test me by asking something of me I wouldn't do of myself?'

'Perhaps that's the only test of love, to do something for the loved one that you would never think of doing—but it isn't that, Tom, I must know what he's writing.'

'Why?'

'Why has he got something to hide?'

'I don't think he has.'

'You can't always show something that's unfinished, it might not be right.'

'That's nonsense -if he can't show it to me, who *can* he show it to? Tom, I don't want to sound crude, but whose side are you on?'

'Why must women always put things that way?'

'I think that's rude.'

'I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be—but it isn't a question of sides.'

'Isn't it? I want something, he wants something else, and you—'

'It will make trouble—'

'Why should it? He'll never know.'

'Supposing he does know?'

'There's nothing he can *do* about it.'

'That's the remark of a woman who doesn't trust anyone.'

The words struck home, and Maggie realised that Tom was right. If only, she thought, I could cease to have glands when I want to think! Here's Tom, sweet, pretty, and at the moment absolutely infuriating. There's Joseph, desirable in a different way, and whom I want—I *want*! But neither of them will do as I wish!

'Tom—dear Tom—I could trust a lot more if I didn't need to be so suspicious.'

'All right, Maggie, I'll do it, but on one condition—'

'What?'

'That you don't *use* anything you read of what I take.'

'What do you mean?'

'If you're so curious you *must* know, very well then, but don't do anything about it, even if you don't like what you read—'

'Even if it is against me?'

'It won't be, Maggie.'

'I'll keep it to myself, if that's what you want.'

'Then it's a deal.'

Maggie was furious, although she tried not to show it. Was it possible—she could hardly bear to think of it—that Joseph had seduced Tom? She had never heard that Tom liked men, but it could be true, and he had made it clear that he and Joseph had taken to each other. For a moment she felt as though she had trapped herself She had brought this situation about, and now it may have turned against

Tom said he would help her, even if he had made conditions. After all, that was nothing but a guilty conscience, it was not as she feared. Half-consciously, she began to stroke Tom, as though she would prove herself wrong, and her fears were stilled as he stirred, and kissed her, and once again asked:

'Do you want me Maggie?'

And she nodded.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I need not have been afraid, for I liked Tom, he seemed to like me, and he was effeminate. Some men do correspond to the 'normal' ideal, that is to say they are heterosexual in behaviour and feeling, and strong in character, but there are many variations in emotional type, some are heterosexual and soft, some are homosexual and tough, some are homosexual and feminine. I judged that Tom was certainly heterosexual, and although aesthetic, physically strong But his inner nature was effeminate, the woman would control him. I knew that this meant he could not really be a threat to me, that he could not take Maggie from me, because Maggie would need something else, someone else, to come up against, to fight. He was the ideal third partner. But I still had to live in the same house as him, and this would not have been possible if he had been antipathetic to me. But he was not. After an initial awkwardness, on his part too because he might have expected me to hate him, we became, if not friends, at least sympathetic to each other He knew about my life from Maggie, and I never made a secret of my friendship with Dachs, but what his life had been or was I did not know, and he did not reveal much to me. I gathered that he had been an actor and a sailor in his young life, and it was possible that Maggie was supporting him now, but I did not ask. It was not my affair if she spent money on him, and as I could not yet support her I was obliged to leave finances to her. But I was not displeased to have Tom around, there was a certain earthiness and decency about him, which comforted me, and he would come and talk when I wished, if he was free, and leave me alone when I wanted to work.

bother me. But I did not trust her. I did not think she was other than my wife, in spirit, still, but I knew that in some way she could not bear my writing, or rather, she hated the effect my book was having on me. And so I resorted to a ruse I had used when I lived with Dachs. My one freedom then had been to invent a code in which I wrote anything I did not wish him to read, a kind of picture-writing. I could feel then that I had secrets, even if I did not intend to use them, and now I felt more secure by using the code once again.

Meanwhile, I had become a slave to the book, I was exhausted with it. I had had to stir up something deep and painful in me, some hidden tension, in order to begin it, and it was only in this painful state that I could write. The superficial sunny quality of my previous work was gone, I was digging to the roots, at the hidden web of fibres where life draws its sustenance, and it was a rending work. I ate and slept mechanically, I wrote almost in a trance, and sometimes when I could work no more, I gazed out of the window for hours.

I dreamed long, complicated dreams, about wrestlers, naked women, policemen and dolls, often about dolls. These dolls were always horrifying, with rouged leering faces, and sometimes real breasts. I had had nightmares before, but not of this grotesque kind. I would have loved to run to Maggie when I woke from such dreams, to have held her and be held by her, but she was downstairs with Tom, and even had Tom not been there, she was not the type of woman to have borne my fear. One day, I felt a desire to get rid of ornamentation, and I made a beginning by taking the pictures off the walls of my room. When Maggie saw me carrying them out of the door, she said :

'What are you doing, Joseph?'

'I just want to get rid of these,' I replied.

'Whatever for?'

'I just felt like it.'

'You are not thinking of moving out, by any chance?'

'Of course not. But what would you think if I did?'

'Oh, Joseph, just that you were—disillusioned with me.'

'No, but I miss sleeping with you.'

'You may if you wish.'

'I thought that just now you only wanted Tom.'

'Tom can sleep alone for one night.'

seemed, had been good for both of us. In the morning, Tom brought us breakfast. It was like having a son, except that he was not much younger than I.

As before, the sexual relation with Maggie made me feel grateful to her, and I felt unhappy about having distrusted her to the extent of writing my book in code. It seemed ridiculous not to trust her when the climactic moment was always one of such giving, and joy. I wanted to tell her about the code, and apologise for my mistrust, but something held me back, somewhere I still did not trust her, not yet. Then, when I went to my room to work, I found that my books were not in the order in which I always carefully put them, someone had looked at them. It could not have been Maggie she had been with me all night, unless he had got up while I slept, but I am a light sleeper and was sure to have been woken by her if she had got out of the bed. The one person it might have been was Tom. But why? If Tom had asked me, I would have read him some of my work, on condition that he did not tell Maggie, for it was Maggie whom I did not wish to show it to until it was finished, not even until it was published. I knew Maggie by now, at least to a certain extent, and I realised that she had a respect for a published book which she might not have for one not yet published, or one which could not get published, and I wanted her, very much, to read and absorb this book. But Tom was different, it would not matter with him, in any case he did not matter to me as Maggie did. I decided to ask him whether he had tried to read my writings, and why he had done so.

I was sad to realise that I had been justified in writing in code. I might have locked my door or locked away the books each night, but that way I might never have found out if Maggie or anyone would try to read them, and I wanted to be able to trust. The best thing to do now was to finish the book as quickly as possible, and publish it if possible. I wrote a letter to Dachs, for I had always intended that he should publish this book too, if he would, and I told him that I had almost finished a work which I thought he would find interesting, and I should like him still to be my publisher, but on the normal basis and allowing me a normal proportion of the earnings and royalties, and that I should require a sum of money as soon as he decided he wanted the

normal work relationship with him. For some reason I felt like apologising to him as I wrote. I did not actually do so, but I wanted to because in some strange way I was beginning to love him, although I knew his grievous faults.

Then I began, once again, to work on my book.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Discreetly, Tom returned to the bedroom to clear away the breakfast things. Maggie was still in bed, looking lovely as she often did in the morning, but the expression on her face was calculating. Tom realised with a start that he did not love her. He had thought he loved her, yesterday he may have actually loved her, but now he did not love her. But he still wanted her, and he knew she needed him; without him now she would be desperate, and he cared for her enough not to want her to be at the point of despair.

'Maggie,' he began, tentatively. 'I did as you asked, I looked at the notebooks, but it's no good—'

'Where are they? What do you mean "it's no good"?'

'He's written them in some strange language, a kind of code. You can't read them. I left them there.'

'In code! I don't believe it! Are you telling the truth?'

'I swear it, Maggie. Last night when you were both asleep I had a look. It's some kind of picture-writing, signs of some sort.'

'It's a joke, to fool us. Perhaps there's no book.'

'It's a book all right, but we can't read it.'

'He's very cunning—'

'I don't think so, just cautious. It seems he's right.'

'Right! Why should you be so interested in him?'

'Maggie, don't you think it would be best to let it drop? He'll publish it eventually, he said so, then you can read it.'

'That'll be too late.'

'Why?'

'Because whatever lies he has told about me will be *there*, for anyone to read—'

'You don't know that he's written lies about you.'

'No, but if he has?'

'You couldn't stop him from publishing them, anyway.'

me—'

'So do I, Maggie, but that doesn't mean—'

'Do you want me now?'

He drew in his breath.

'Yes but –'

'Then why are you standing there in those silly clothes when you ought to be in here without them?'

'But Maggie—'

'But what?'

'Joseph's just left you.'

'Why should that make any difference? I thought you said you aren't a moralist.'

'I'm not, but it still doesn't seem quite right.'

'Very well then, if you refuse what I offer you, if you scruple where plenty of other men would not, I've no further use for you!'

'Maggie, you know that isn't true, you're pretending.'

'I'm perfectly serious. Look at me!'

She threw back the bedclothes and took off her night-dress.

'Aren't I beautiful? Or don't you think so?'

'You are beautiful, Maggie, but you are a bitch!'

'All right, so I am, but the point is, do you want this body or not?'

'And if I say I don't want it, now, like this?'

'Then I should say perhaps you are more sensible than I would have thought. Now go and see to the breakfast things, there's a good man, and leave me to think.'

Tom left the bedroom thankfully. It had been a near thing. Maggie had never asked him before to make love to her she always waited for him to ask her, and he had not been sure whether she meant what she said, whether she really did have no use for him if he refused her. No, he didn't love her, but he did admire her, yet she was a bitch, a sweet, beautiful bitch and he knew that if he were Joseph he would divorce her however much he might love her, for a woman like that could drive a man mad. He knew that Joseph was in some way different to him, that he saw Maggie differently, and that really she respected Joseph more, but still she could hurt him, she was hurting him, and for his own sake he should be careful.

Tom felt that from now on he too would have to go carefully. He did not want to have to give Maggie up yet. He

carried on the arrangement indefinitely, but he felt it could not last, perhaps only until Joseph had finished his book, and then it would end. Whatever others meant by love, his experiences had been similar to each other, a series of women, sometimes older than himself, whose companion he became for a time, some of whom had worshipped him physically, all of whom had been beautiful, and fickle. He supposed it was because he suited their inconstant natures, he did not wish to make demands, was prepared to please, could maintain his desire for as long as the most deeply insecure of them could demand, and did not try to keep them after they had finished with him. He was, in the truest sense of the words, a ladies' man, he understood them, could please them and did not ask for what he could not have. It was perhaps his life of wandering which had made him like that, for he was an orphan, brought up in an orphanage, had spent his adolescence at sea and had made use of a natural talent by working for a year or two as an actor, roaming from theatre to theatre about the country.

Most orphans spend years of their lives looking for parents, perhaps not their real parents but substitutes for those they did not know when young, with whom they can work out those conflicts which are inevitably part of the way we grow. Tom had sought, and found, and lost again, and finally realised what he was doing and that, for him, the best way was to be the lover of a married woman, or women. His temperament might have made him a ponce, but he would not regard being supported by women as a way of life, he wanted to be able to have his independence when necessary, and he was glad of his profession as actor for this reason. He took life as it came.

But this situation differed from others he had been in, in as much as he had never lived in the house of a married woman he was making love to before, had never known the husband. He had been sincere when he said he liked Joseph, and while he did not feel guilty towards him for sleeping with Maggie, because he knew that in the long run this would not hurt him, he did feel guilty for having looked at the notebooks, for finding out his secret by stealth, as though this might have harmed him in some way, for having betrayed that secret to Maggie. It struck him that a sexual relationship necessarily involves more than sex, but that he had not really been aware of this before because his feelings

not had any involvement with the lives of his women, but knowing Joseph and liking him showed him that, in a triangular relationship in which all three are sexually involved, loyalty is impossible, and it was the vision of himself he was obliged by the situation to have, as a disloyal person, which was disturbing him. In order to allay his guilt, he had to tell Joseph that he had tried to read his book, and as soon as he had finished with the breakfast things he went upstairs and knocked on his door.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I was writing when Tom entered, and he said :

'I didn't meant to interrupt, Joseph., I'll go.'

'No, don't go, I'd like to talk to you.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes,' I said, 'please sit down,' and he stayed.

'Tom,' I began, 'it seems to me that you and I are shall I say, sympathetic to each other—'

Tom seemed a little surprised at this observation, and he waited to see what I would add.

'I say this because well, I'll come to the point someone has been looking through my notebooks and I can't see how it could have been anyone else but you, although why you should have—'

'How did you know?' The words came out of Tom's mouth as though of their own volition, forced out by surprise.

'I always leave them in a certain order, and they were not in that order this morning.'

'You might have forgotten.'

'No, I remember exactly how I left them.'

'Well, you're a lot more efficient than I would have thought. Yes, Joseph, I did look at them, and I want to apologise for it.'

'I'm very glad you said that, Tom. Now let us forget it, you couldn't read them, so no harm was done. I shan't ask you why you did it, I assume it was sheer curiosity.'

'No, it wasn't that.'

'Then what was it?'

I considered for a moment, then replied :

'I could just say that is my affair, but you had the grace to apologise just now, so I shall tell you. Yes, I am.'

'Then why don't you do something about it, like throwing me out of the house?'

'I understand why Maggie should want you, and I don't feel the right to force anyone to do what they don't want to do, or not to do what they want, besides—'

'But Maggie is trying to force *you*.'

'How?'

'She asked me to look at your notebooks.'

'I see, so it was Maggie. Thank you for telling me.'

'And she wants to make you jealous—of me.'

'Why do you tell me that? I already know it.'

'You love her, Joseph, don't you?'

'Yes. Do you?' I asked.

'No, not any more.'

'I'm surprised, I thought you did.'

'No. I don't think I'm the loving kind.'

'Why do you say that?'

'I know myself.'

'Tell me about yourself,' I asked.

So Tom told me his story. When he had finished, he said :

'You and I have one thing in common. I don't know if I'm right, but I should think you were born poor.'

'Yes, I was,' I concurred.

'But Maggie wasn't. There's a difference between the rich and the poor, Joseph, a big difference. The poor are deprived, don't have what they need, they're usually distorted in their bodies by want and work. You and I escaped most of that, but we're poor boys just the same, and the great virtue of it is that we appreciate things, we don't take anything for granted. Now Maggie was spoiled, she doesn't really appreciate what she's got. Of course, it's the rich who say it's they who know how to appreciate, but they don't mean the real things of life, the basic things, and the funny part of it is that it's Maggie who is ambitious, not you or I.'

'Yes, Tom,' I said, 'but could there be a Maggie without luxury, without superfluous things, without people who don't work themselves to death?'

'Should there be a Maggie?' asked Tom.

I did not reply, and both of us knew that it was not really

with hers, and she could no more not have existed than we could not have existed, and no less. Then Tom said:

'It would be better if you don't tell Maggie that I told you I looked at your books, or that she wants you to be jealous.'

'Yes, you're right,' I agreed. 'It may be a funny relationship, but I think you and I *are* friends.'

'In a way. At least, if there's anything I can do for you, I will.'

'Thank you.'

'I'll leave you to get on with the book now. How's it going, by the way?'

'I've almost done.'

'Good for you. But I suppose that means I'll soon be leaving.'

'No, why?'

'Once you're finished, you'll have time for Maggie, and that will mean she won't have time for me.'

'But you could stay on, just as a friend.'

'Thanks, but I wouldn't do that. When I don't sleep with the wife any more, it's goodbye to the husband, too.'

'You mean you often do this?'

'It was a joke really, but I mean I should leave.'

'Perhaps—you have already left.'

'Not yet, but I should think it won't be long. It's for Maggie to decide.'

I felt a tiny twinge of angry pride at this remark. I had been obliged to write this book, for I had to establish my independence from Dachs and from Maggie, apart from my other purposes in writing it; but it was a stage on the road to freedom, and I knew now that freedom was what I wanted, the freedom to live as I wished and as best expressed my values. It was for Maggie to decide now, when Tom would go and whether he could sleep with her, but it would not always be so, it would eventually be for both of us to decide.

When Tom had left me, my mind played with the image of him, his physical presence, his beauty, like a poem. Some young men are most beautiful, as they are vulnerable, in that portion of the body called the solar plexus. There is the angularity of the ribs, then a slight inner curve, underneath which show the deceptively soft ripples of muscle, and all covered by smooth, pure flesh. I had never seen Tom naked, but I judged him to have this type of body, and I knew the appeal it would have for women, especially a woman like

little side of my own mind. How strange, how beautiful it must be to be Maggie, to be confirmed in one's inner being, in a sense one's deepest being, by the contact and penetration of such a body. I had never wanted to *be* a woman, just to know, really know, what it was like to be a woman. A man like myself has to choose which path he will take, to live a pseudo version of the secrets of a woman, those secrets known by all women but forever hidden from all men of whatever proclivity, for the body of a man cannot change into that of a woman, however much it is loved, or however alien to itself the spirit which inhabits it, or to live as a man is required by his flesh to live, and after one submission to the choice of another, for my life with Dachs had been Dachs' choice, I had chosen my own path, as Maggie's husband. I realised that Tom was a danger to me because I was attracted to him, could even fall in love with him. How lovely Tom's body must be! How I envied Maggie! But, although I could have wanted Tom almost as much as I wanted Maggie, I did not intend to give in to my desire. I was glad of his friendship, for I liked him, he was humble, he accepted his destiny without being self-effacing, and I wanted to have a friend. Maggie had wanted me to be jealous, but she had not realised in what way I would be jealous, that I would want to be in her place and not in Tom's, and if she had realised she must have a strange attitude towards men. But it was, and had always been, love and not sex only between us, and whereas sex is a matter of the glands, love is a matter of the will, providing the will is free to love, and I believed that Maggie still loved me, and I knew that I still loved her.

And if I loved her, my task was to finish my book, I had just one more chapter to write, and that night before I posted my letter to Dachs, I was able to re-open it and cross out the word 'almost' — I had finished it.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I received a reply from Dachs almost immediately. He said that he was very glad I was writing again, he would like to see me to talk about the new book, if I would come alone, and he hoped that I was happy, that was all.

might very well be as far as he could bring himself to go in saying he had given in, that he accepted the marriage and my terms for a work-relationship. I did not really mind that he asked to see me alone, without Maggie, for after the previous meeting it was hardly to be expected that he would welcome seeing her again, and I felt I would be freer to say what I wished to say to Dachs without her presence.

I considered for some time whether or not I ought to tell Maggie. If I went alone without telling her, and she found out, she might think I was planning to take up the old relationship with Dachs again. After the book was published it would be different, I was sure, but until then our ralationship would remain tense. And if I told her, she would be more anxious and afraid than ever, she would if possible prevent our meeting, and might even do something desperate to try to prevent it. It was certain that she would neither go herself nor, if possible, allow me to go, but I wished to go; there was no other way but to deceive her It is only for a time, for a short time, that I need to deceive her, I thought. She is sure to change later; after the book is out, she will change.

I knew how to arrange things, I asked Tom to help. I put the problem quite frankly to him, saying that I would be grateful if he could arrange to take Maggie somewhere for the time that I wished to see Dachs Tom did not quite understand why I should still want Dachs to publish my work, as other publishers would almost certainly be interested in a new book by an established author, but he admitted that he knew nothing about such matters, he could see that Maggie would be difficult if she knew, and he agreed to do as I asked.

All I wanted from Dachs was an agreement to publish my work, especially my new book, on a normal basis, that if he would have a normal business relationship with me, I would try to be friends Now that I was going to meet Dachs on his own terms I became aware of something frightening, even terrifying, which I had not been aware of before except at moments when I had actually been with Dachs. When I resisted him, Dachs represented a great fear, a fear that I was nothing and could not be anything, that I and all men other than the strong and ruthless few existed merely as a background to this élite. I knew that it was not really true,

It was perhaps this fear which had caused me to carry on the old relationship with Dachs. There had been, at times, something almost intolerably sweet in submitting, as though I were entirely exposed, naked, vulnerable, something like swimming naked in the sea just before making love, when the expectation and excitement are upon one. But since the moment I met Maggie all that had changed. Now, when I was the object of Maggie's caresses, when she kissed my naked body and told me how beautiful she thought I was, it was different. I was always male, hard, and unyielding, and always I had to have my way, or to give way freely, for every impulse, every tautness of the flesh, was significant and serious, when it was taking place between us, or rather it was so when something in her soul was not resisting to the death me and all men. It was for these moments that she needed Tom, for with him there was nothing to resist, he was like water. For this reason I felt at times that she might need both of us permanently, but without pushing Tom out I would resist this because I wanted Maggie and myself to work things out together, and I felt, I hoped fervently that it was true, that this meant I was imperceptibly growing into a full male.

I wondered whether this might not be the result of convention, that it is convention which says that, if a man sleeps with a woman who is, when she is happy with him, his to command, he is entirely male, but even if it was, it coincided with my way of maleness, it was what confirmed me as a sexually male being, and it was what I would defend, if Maggie would come to me and leave Tom of her own accord.

In this I felt Tom's acquiescence, that Tom wished people to be themselves quite without selfishness, and that he realised that sole possession of Maggie as a sexual being was my true nature and a right. But I could not feel such rights. Even if it were my true way I could not acknowledge rights, because I was for the most part incapable of experiencing anyone else as an object. Anyone else, that is, except myself, and this was the source of my fear in respect of Dachs.

It was as though I would be killed if I resisted this object existence in relation to Dachs. It was true that, as I had heard, he had threatened to kill me, but that had only been the confirmation of the fear, not the source, although what

the source was I could only wish I knew, and try to understand. It was something, some negative attitude, I held towards myself, a condemnation for not having resisted him. There was certainly guilt for having had the relationship, but that guilt, at the time, had spiced the situation with excitement and I still felt some need to guard against this, in case it led me astray. But the deeper guilt was for the fact of having allowed fear to dominate me; I was guilty for not fully living because I had feared — what? It was the fear of death, the fear that I could not throw myself into life in case I did not survive. How can I afford to take the chance of not surviving, even of not surviving a battle with Dachs, when I have not yet justified my life? Then I realised that this was a luxury neither I nor anyone else could afford, that I *was* demanding rights, but over life rather than people. If I were to live, and be as I wished to be, I had no choice. I *had* to take the risk and resist what was trying to force me, or hurt me, or sometimes what was merely opposing me, otherwise I *was* submitting.

Now I knew what I must do—to insist on what I wanted from Dachs, never again to be imposed upon by him, and when the time came, to be firm with Maggie. For the first time, I thought that Maggie and I should have a family, that I wanted to give her children, and my self-doubt was shot through with joy as I realised that I was now really leaving the past behind.

And so I went to see Dachs, who received me in that gay, expansive mood which I recognised as his mood after a successful night of love, and was meant to tell me that he didn't need me any more, but which I recognised was always his most dangerous mood.

As I usually did with Dachs, I immediately felt robbed of all importance in his presence, but I fought for inner self-control, which, while I succeeded to some extent in retaining my inner resistance to him rendered me stilted in speech. After the initial politenesses, he asked:

'What is the matter, Joseph, you seem ill at ease?'

'It's just the fact of our meeting after our—estrangement.'

'Ah, so you want to be reconciled?'

'No, I came to talk business.'

Dachs ignored this.

'How are you finding married life?'

'Wonderful, Dachs—Maggie is wonderful.'

provided you with—Tom.'

'What do you mean?'

'It's all over town, Joseph, that Maggie has had to bring in Tom—for her, or you or both of you.'

I found myself trembling from head to foot.

'I warn you, Dachs—'

'Don't threaten *me*, Joseph!'

'Don't insult Maggie or me!'

'Or Tom?' asked Dachs, with an unruffled smile.

'Don't insult anyone.'

'Why shouldn't I?'

'Because—I say so!'

'Really? By the way, I should like to see your book.'

'Here,' I thrust it at him, 'here it is.'

'Leave it with me. I will tell you what I think of it—whether it is of publishable standard and all that. Is there anything else you came for?'

'Yes, to tell you you're a very frightened man. I feel sorry for you—I want to be friends.'

'Then show me friendship, Joseph. You said you came on business—'

'But you're a bastard.'

'I shall hit you, Joseph, if you talk to me like that!'

I feared only that my nerve would give way and my arms become paralysed.

'Please,' I said in my mind to the God that certain people pray to when they are afraid, 'please let me stand my ground!'

'As I said, you are a bastard!'

Dachs got up and lunged at me. Before I realised what was happening we were rolling on the floor. I am really very strong, stronger than Dachs, but I feared that I would not be able to bring my strength into play, and that, if I did, I would injure him. I felt I must win this fight, must prepare to fight to the death. But Dachs suddenly released his hold and without warning kissed me on the mouth. Shocked, I lay still, and Dachs laughed his contemptuous laugh, then picking himself up from the floor, held out his hand to me.

'Let me help you, Joseph.'

I held on to his hand as I got up, then, in a sudden burst of fury with myself, hit him as hard as I could. Reeling back, he said:

I heard him, but just his voice, not the individual words, not until I remembered them later. I stared at my hand, I could hardly believe it was *my* hand, this fist which had battered at Dachs' flesh. I remember I looked at Dachs, who was holding his jaw, not really comprehending what had happened, then I slowly walked out of the room.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I had not been afraid to fight with Dachs, but I felt defeated all the same. I continued to look at my hand as I walked along the street; hitting Dachs had been against myself even though I had not insulted him more than he had insulted me and it had been he who attacked me. The contact of my fist against the flesh had of itself been something tender, almost loving, although my intention had been to hurt and I had hurt, not because it was Dachs but because it was a human being. And I had not frightened him nor made him understand that he had hurt me unjustly. Of course, Dachs could not know that I had changed, that the kiss would disgust me, but he did not give people any choice they had to be what he wanted them to be, to submit to his ego, or he injured them. I felt humiliated, deeply so. Why had I not been able to stand my ground without provoking a fight, and how would it be possible to get Dachs to consider his behaviour wrong? Dachs was harming me he was doubtless helping to spread the slander about Tom and Maggie and myself, but the fight would have done nothing to stop this, on the contrary, it might make things worse; I felt that Dachs had just got the better of me and that he would be able to turn this situation, as all others, into a victory.

The parting shot about 'Mummy' really distressed me. It wasn't true, Maggie was not a mother to me in any way, except, at the moment, in the matter of money, and this was Dachs' doing. When I was bringing in money, when Maggie and I were living on my income, I would not be open to this accusation. I supposed this was partly why Maggie had wanted to sue Dachs, but I was glad I had not done so, even if I had won the case he would be more and not less confirmed in his present behaviour, he would be convinced, or pretend he was, that Maggie was driving me along, and

seemed to me that when I allowed Dachs or others to run things, everything went smoothly, even if I hated the situation, but when I used my freedom and my will everything became a mess. Then I realised that this was partly an illusion of perspective, because I found it hard to believe in my own affirmation of myself in action, and partly the result of lack of experience, which came from years of living with Dachs. But messy or not I intended to keep to my position. I missed my book, then realised that I had left it with Dachs. I decided to wait and see what he thought of it, for I knew that whatever the situation he would give a reasonably honest opinion, and if he did not satisfy me, I would go to another publisher.

I had told Dachs that he was a frightened man, and I knew that it was true, however well-covered he kept his fear, but of what was he afraid, what did he imagine would happen if he ceased to keep a controlling grip on everything he wanted? It was true that he had lost me as a sexual partner, but he could not have prevented that however much he tried, and why should he believe that everything would fall away from him if he loosened his hold? Then I realised, as I must always really have known, that Dachs' life was based, not on anything in himself or that he could do himself, but on other men's talents, that he was only important in so far as he could enhance and exploit the work of others, he was creative only as an organiser, not at all as an artist. There was no inherent reason why artists should need him and so he mostly had to force them to need him. Almost all young artists needed help, and informed opinion was not easy to find, but this did not mean that they must be bound for life to the person who helped them, and Dachs *was* bound to artists, or he had no function. Yet he was a remarkable man, and I felt sorry that he should need to live in perpetual fear of being unwanted, useless. I would wait, I would try never to let myself be carried away by anger and violence again, and my book should do what I myself could not. If Dachs and I could freely and sympathetically acknowledge each other, then he would have played his part in creation, and the world would accept that a man like him was also a creative force. Yet I was unsure, in this struggle I was very unsure of myself, and to wait, from now on, would be painful in the extreme.

I found that Maggie and Tom had arrived home before

climb the stairs as quietly as possible, but her very acute ears heard me and she came out of the living room.

'Why Joseph, your shirt is torn, and your jacket is dirty—what happened?'

'Nothing, I fell over,' and I hurried up the stairs before she could question me further.

A little later, as I was changing my clothes there was a knock on my door.

'Go away, please, Maggie, I'll talk to you later,' I called out.

'It's Tom.'

'Oh come in Tom, if you want to, I'm just changing.'

Tom shut the door behind him, then said :

'Just tell me anything other than that you fell over, anything at all, and I'll go away—'

'Maggie will have to believe that I fell over, or that I'm lying, Tom, but I'll tell you what really happened if you will keep it to yourself—'

When I had finished, Tom said :

'You weren't to blame, he certainly asked for it, but why did you leave your book with him, or did you just forget it?'

'I want him to read my book, I want him to realise that he is capable of something better than the kind of behaviour he habitually indulges in.'

'You're a dreamer, Joseph, a crazy idealist.'

'No, I'm not, I'm not a materialist, that's all. It's the materialists who are the fantasists, not me. Everyone can change and grow if only they will let go of what they imagine they need to control in order to live at all. It's that holding on which is the trouble, because it means turning people into things, and this is the ultimate in materialism.'

'You're trying to treat Dachs as a guinea-pig.'

'No,' I replied, 'he just happens to be the one who used me.'

'We're all used sometimes, Joseph.'

'But we shouldn't basically be objects to be used.'

'I don't mind being used, when I want to be—'

'You're different, Tom, you don't suffer from pride—but what will become of you—when you are old?'

He laughed.

'I'll worry about it then, if I live so long '

I had been changing my clothes, I was standing in just my underpants when, with a shock, I realised Tom's sexual

realised I had done so for Tom's sake, or rather, for my own sake in relation to Tom. I turned my back on Tom to hide my reaction, and reluctantly slipped on some fresh clothes. If only things were a little different, if only I could have Tom and Maggie as Maggie had Tom and myself, but she could do it and, apparently, manage to live with herself, whereas I knew that I would not be able to do so. Tom knew, of course, what I was feeling, for it was part of his charm that he was in tune with every sensual nuance, that the waves of feeling which forever flow between all sentient beings, even of different species, whether noticed or not, and whether consciously rejected or accepted, were felt and acknowledged by him, whatever he chose to do about it, but he did not reveal anything of his comprehension of my feelings to me, by word or act.

How lovely, how desirable, Tom was! And how devilishly clever of Dachs to have realised that I did, I must, desire Tom! But this made it all the more imperative that I must not give way to my desire. How strange that we should be so entirely opposite in type; Tom was as fair as I was dark, and whereas I was muscled flesh, he was muscled bone

I finished dressing and turned to Tom. I could not help from putting my hand on his arm, and the tender feeling was similar to the involuntary feeling of my flesh when I had struck Dachs, but this time it was love, for my will concurred. The two of us looked into each other's eyes. Myself, the husband; Tom, the lover; both desiring the wife, both her lovers, and both—I dared to think it—desiring each other. But that look said something else, too. I did not know whether Tom had actually loved a man, but I read in his eyes that our mutual desire was a mutual trust, that for the sake of our feelings he would be faithful to me in the way which was possible, as a true, a trusted friend.

I said to him :

'Tom, I shan't come down right now, I've something to do. Tell Maggie anything you please, but not the truth.' And to myself I added : 'Nor the truth about us, not ever,' and I thought that the tyranny of choice, of relationship, the tyranny of love, was harsher than any that Dachs or anyone like him could ever impose.

Then I sat down to write Dachs a letter. I wanted to tell him that we should not have fought, that still, despite everything, I wanted to be friends, that he could have more by

at least for the time being, I could not communicate with him, and I feared that unless he made the first move I would never be able to communicate with him again, and my cause be proved a failure.

The following morning, while I was eating my breakfast, a telegram came for me. It said :

'Will publish. Name your terms. Dachs.' That was all, but it was more than enough.

He must have read the book immediately, and he had obviously liked it a great deal But the offer to name my own terms! It was the realisation of a dream. He could be magnanimous after all, and I could be free of him and have the relationship I wanted with him. I felt as though I had won a great battle, or rather, a great war, and now the peace to follow would be heaven. But ought I to tell Maggie? She would be furious that I had gone to Dachs, that I had shown him the book before I showed it to her, that I had neither asked for nor received my money, but would she not be pleased that Dachs had capitulated? I decided to ask Tom what I ought to do, he would probably be able to take a more objective view than I could myself.

I felt strange, somewhat embarrassed, to think that Dachs had read the book. I had intended it for Maggie and for him, I hoped it would have a considerable, even profound effect, and now I would know. Life, which had seemed so harsh when I felt the cruelty of never being able, directly, to express my love for Tom, now seemed far more benevolent. With certain natures life is kind or cruel depending on whether one can mould it to the heart's desire, and if the heart in question is pure, this can be a loving wish.

Maggie went out on her own that morning, a thing she rarely did, and I was able to have Tom to myself. After I had told him about the telegram, he said :

'Well, Maggie's getting ready to finish with me—'

'How do you know?' I asked. 'Has she told you?'

'No, but she doesn't need to. She was, well, more giving of herself last night than she has ever been. It's happened to me before, that just when a woman's been planning to give me up she's appeared to want me most—perhaps it's to show me what I'll be missing.'

'Perhaps—she does want you more,' I suggested.

'No, she wants *you* really, you'll see. All the same, she will

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'If you don't tell her anything until the reviews appear, if they're first class, she'll have to accept that you were right, or at least forgive you. If they're bad, you're in trouble anyway.'

'You're right,' I agreed. 'I did want her to read it as soon as Dachs accepted it, but it wouldn't do any good, I'll have to wait.'

When Maggie came home, I asked her :

'Are you happy?'

'No,' she admitted, frankly. 'You ignore me completely now.'

'I shan't any more. I've finished the book. For the moment I've nothing to do but please you.'

'Do you really mean it?'

'Look at me,' I asked. 'What do you think?'

'You do mean it! Oh, Joseph—'

'But what,' I asked her, 'about Tom?'

'I was thinking this morning that I prefer you as a lover, anyway. I'll tell him it's over, and he'll leave.'

'But I like him,' I said. 'Can't you persuade him to stay, as a friend?'

'Be reasonable, Joseph. I can bear to have a lover in the house, but not an ex-lover.'

I suspect that she realised I desired Tom, for she knew how very desirable he could be, and that she had decided that when she ceased to want him, he should not stay longer than absolutely necessary.

'Besides, Joseph,' she continued, 'I think he's ready to go. He acts, you know, and he's just been offered a good part. It's a long way away, up north, somewhere dreary and provincial, but he's used to that, he likes to travel. Anyway, he'll be back.'

Yes, I thought, he is ready to go, but I shall miss him It may be difficult to talk to Maggie, and I was used to talking to him. And others will always savour his fair beauty, but I never shall. Don't go, Tom, stay with us, no-one will ever appreciate you as I do. You are used to being orphaned, you were orphaned from the beginnig, but I shall be orphaned for a second time by your departure, of your beauty, your fair skin, the way you stand, look, walk, smile But he will go. How ridiculous it all is, that human beings cannot be

even if we do not quite understand each other. But if it were possible to choose twice I should choose Tom, if he would have me. And I felt a great regret for what is impossible in human life.

But I said:

'I suppose you are right, he must follow his work. But he must promise to come to us whenever he is in London.'

'Aren't you the tiniest bit jealous,' Maggie asked, 'of Tom and me, I mean?'

'I was, then I was not, and now I know that everyone has either no rights at all, or the same right to happiness.'

'Meaning?'

'I love you.'

'I have to say that I'm glad you realise it again. Can it really be that just to finish your book has—freed you to love me again, so completely?'

I did not answer, but said:

'What shall we do today?'

And Maggie replied:

'Joseph who does not ask, I ask you—come to bed with me—now.'

I did so, and I too felt that she had never given of herself as she gave then, and once again I asked:

'Are you happy, Maggie?'

'I'm trying to be—I shall be,' she replied.

And both of us were troubled.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

When Tom realised that Joseph had taken Maggie to bed for the afternoon, he decided that it was time for him to leave. These partings were always more painful for him than he was ever willing to admit, but they had to be, it was his way of life. He always regretted the end of something good, and his relationship with Maggie had not been bad, both of them had gained what they wanted, and Joseph had too. He realised that he regretted leaving Joseph more than he regretted leaving Maggie, for with Maggie it had been something with which he was familiar, even though she was perhaps the most desirable of women, but with Joseph

the contact of man, woman or child, but he had never had a physical relationship with man, he had never desired it, but for Joseph he had begun to feel the desire which comes from affinity, a sympathy of the flesh and of the soul, and he knew that Joseph felt it too He had the capacity to put himself in the place of another and he realised that, while for him it had the attraction of something strange, new, of a desire which he had never felt before and might never feel again, for Joseph it was the expression of a part of himself which he had long acknowledged, and this made of his frustration a sacrifice, which he accomplished willingly because he wished to be Maggie's husband, but nonetheless it was painful, a denial of the heart. He was sorry that it should be so for Joseph, and he also realised that he had a respect for him because he was an unusal man. He felt that he might have had a relationship with him deeper than any he had had, that he might have experienced emotions which now would be lost to him for ever, and he felt the regret for what might be but will not be, known to all who follow a destiny. Then he thought of the new love, or loves, who undoubtedly awaited him wherever he was going, and he knew that he need never regret anything, because for him there would always be the future, the open road, the compensation of the way.

He left a note for Maggie, and one for Joseph. In what he wrote to Maggie he managed to convey something of the very special quality of touch, of taste, of smell, which was what it meant to him to make love to her. It was a note of thanks, which made Maggie smile wistfully when she read it and for a wild moment wish that she could spread that appreciation wide among the ranks of men. To Joseph, Tom said that, as he had known, the time had come to leave, that he sincerely hoped all would be well between him and Maggie, and gave an address from which he said he could always be contacted should Joseph need his help at any time. He hoped that the book would be a great success. Reading it, Joseph felt both angry at life because he had had, in order to be himself, to renounce Tom as a lover, Tom whom he desired more than he had ever desired a man and almost as much as Maggie, and happiness, a pure joy at having made a friend, perhaps the first person in his life who understood, and tolerated beyond the limits of understanding.

call. They represented his choices, his choice of freedom from Dachs, of heterosexual love, of the woman, and the choice of love of Maggie. These were the two mementos of his freedom, and he felt that they placed all that had gone before in the perspective of the memory of a fate.

Maggie would dearly have liked to know what Tom had put in his note to Joseph, but she would not ask and decided not to spy any more. As she put down her letter, she said to Joseph :

'He's gone without needing to be told. I must say that if I had to have a lover, I made a perfect choice.'

And Joseph added :

'Yes, you did.'

'I married a strange man,' she thought. 'He's good, perhaps, but strange,' and she felt afraid.

* * *

I wrote a note to Dachs thanking him and explaining that I wanted only the usual terms, and saying we could sign a contract later on. I decided that until the book was published, I would, as far as possible, do as Maggie wished. She had been deprived of my company and my attention for long enough, and now that I had the time and she had admitted that I was really the man she wanted, I would give her all I could. Everywhere she wanted to go we went together, we were together almost all of the time, but she still was not contented. She had not got from me what she wanted, and it extended into the sexual sphere, for now, however much I tried, I could not quite satisfy her. She did not complain, but she was not at peace.

One morning she told me she had received a letter from her mother, whom I had never met because she had been abroad since before Maggie and I had married; she intended to return to England. Maggie asked me whether I minded if she stayed with us for a while. I didn't like the idea, for I did not think we should like one another, but I said I didn't mind, because I wanted to please Maggie and I thought it would be unreasonable to refuse. When I first saw her, standing in our doorway with a travelling bag in her hand, I trembled, for she was both like and unlike her daughter. She had the dark Slavic looks, the high Oriental cheekbones of her race, in relation to her I could see that Maggie was

elder sister, and whereas beneath the changing expressions of Maggie's face there was always anxiety, beneath the mother's smile there was the antagonism of the practised feminine warrior against maleness.

'Dear Joseph,' she held out a polished hand. 'Maggie mentioned that you are handsome, but, well, my dear, you are much *too* handsome!'

I was irritated by this barbed compliment, as I was intended to be. She had no foreign accent, for although born a Slav, she had been educated in England, and unlike Maggie's high musical voice, hers was deep and rich. She made an impression of richness in every material way, her clothes, her possessions, her manner, her assumption that the earth and the fruits thereof existed primarily, if not entirely, for her, Sarah's, well-being and pleasure, and for almost nothing else which could be said to matter. On that first day she asked me to call her Sarah, an Anglicised version of her Slavic name, which seemed to please Maggie, but which expressed an intimacy I could not feel. She did not like me, I did not know why, but I felt it, that she did not consider me a proper man. I was sure that Maggie would not have told her of my relationship with Dachs, but it was not necessarily because of anything she knew about me, it was what some people call instinct, but which is perhaps really a wilful attachment to their pleasures, the desire not to be morally challenged. A man may be looked upon as suspect by a woman in this manner because she doubts his manhood, and this is hurtful, and then he sees her with a man of her choice, and knows at once that she has chosen him because he is more animal, cruder, with a greater desire to injure, and this is the most damaging because then he is hurt in what he values, he is rejected because of his finer aspirations. Of course, if he does not care about the woman as a woman it does not really matter, but the difficulty is that it is really impossible not to care. The question for woman is whether she will help to raise man up, or, seduced by her own desires for primitivism, hold him down.

After a few days, during which I was as polite as I could manage to Sarah, and she was complimentary to me in her ironical fashion, Maggie said:

'Sarah tries so hard with you, but you don't seem to like her, Joseph.'

'We are just different kinds of people, Maggie, but you don't need to worry about that.'

'What worries me, Joseph, is that you seem to be a different kind of person to anyone. Sarah's been everywhere and known everyone, she is perhaps a little too sophisticated, but she can at least get on with people. You could learn a little more of her worldliness, Joseph.'

It was not a rebuke, it was a sad plea, and justified from Maggie's point of view, but I did not want to be worldly. The pleasure I felt when I finished my book, the happiness of friendship with Tom, the golden glow I experienced when I caressed Maggie's breasts in the night, and through them the contact with nature, was all I needed of the world. For the rest, I wished only to be left alone, especially by Sarah, but she could not leave me alone, my existence was a threat to her, and I realised it was because Maggie and I were, or could be, sexually happy. I was sure that despite her three husbands, for I had learned that she had been married three times, and a number of lovers, she had never been satisfied, and our simple life was a reproach to her whole existence.

One evening, at dinner, she said:

'Well, Maggie darling, London does not seem to be what it was and I frankly admit that I'm bored. You two live like a couple of hermits—not that I've anything against hermits, some of them are wonderful people, but I've never heard that they marry—and I wonder that this—well—middle-class existence doesn't seem tiresome to you, too.'

I was angry, and I said:

'Life isn't intended to be a garden of pleasures.'

'Perhaps it isn't for you, Joseph,' she replied, 'but I have known it to be.'

I knew that I had known more real joy, and probably more real sorrow, in my life than she had, but I did not want to defend my life, I simply wanted to be accepted as I was, but this, I realised, Sarah found very difficult to do.

'Personally, I like it here, in this house,' I said, 'and I believe Maggie does too. I had hoped that you would.'

'From what I remember of Maggie,' replied Sarah, 'she was never one to stay at home for long.'

'We enjoy a quiet life now,' I said.

'Joseph,' said Maggie, tentatively, 'it is true that I have got used to us staying at home rather a lot, but Mother is

'You see!' said Sarah, unable to keep a note of triumph out of her voice. 'When you say "we" enjoy a quiet life Joseph, I think that you are perhaps using the royal plural.'

I was angry with Maggie for having allowed her mother to come between us, to any extent, and I was very angry with Sarah, but I did not wish to demonstrate anger. I thought it should always be possible to try to create harmony between even the most unalike members of a family.

'Please, Sarah,' I asked, naively, 'I know the relationship of son and mother-in-law can be difficult, but I would appreciate an effort on your part not to come between Maggie and me, as I try not to disturb the harmony between you—'

'I think your husband is uncivilised, and that is the *worst* thing I can say,' remarked Sarah icily, and left the table.

'Joseph, how can you?' Maggie was furious with me. 'Are you crazy? Sarah has tried her uttermost to get along with you, but you seem deliberately to set yourself against her! Please remember that she is my mother, and apologise.'

I had said nothing but what I thought was the truth, and probably all three of us had done that, but Sarah had disrupted the relationship between Maggie and myself, which I had been at such pains to put on a less precarious balance. I would not allow either of us to lead a stupid butterfly existence for her sake or for anyone else's. I could not apologise and I could not placate Maggie in any other way, and I refused to quarrel. In my turn I left the table. I excused myself to Maggie, went to my room and spent the rest of the evening alone.

I could only wait, as patiently as possible, until my book should be published. I wanted it to do for me all that I felt was so very difficult to do in life, in the ephemeral moment. If only Maggie, and Dachs, and now the wayward Sarah, would accept what I had to say, what I could not say *to* them, I felt that we might begin a life such as would be a glory and a blessing to the world, but at times like this I doubted everything, to the point of despair, and to try to raise my spirits I thought of Tom. He had understood, and I wondered where he was now, what other love he had found, but the thought of my sacrifice, that I had had to let him go, made me feel sad in a different way, and alone. I went to bed to sleep, and forget.

'Joseph, Joseph, darling—look!'

She had a copy of a newspaper in her hand, open at the literary reviews, and one of them was a long column on my book; Dachs must have given it to the critics without even telling me that he had published.

'Mr Dachs,' it began, 'the impresario-publisher, has leaped off his sick-bed into what may well prove the triumph of his career. He has published a novel, by his protégé Joseph Ashley, which I prophesy will rank among the foremost—'

Before I read on, I said a silent prayer:

'Please,' I prayed, 'now may Maggie and Dachs take the book, and not merely the review, to heart.'

BOOK TWO

'The story told in this book,' the review continued, 'is of a classical simplicity. Alfred Rush, an inexperienced provincial youth, comes to London, which to him is a hell of indifference, and where for a time he is lost. He meets an older man, a homosexual, a powerful dominating figure, who seduces him, and they live together. In a relatively short while, Alfred is turned from a gauche, inarticulate boy into a sophisticated cosmopolitan, but he hates the falsity of the world in which he lives. Then he meets a young woman with whom he falls in love, and leaves his friend to marry her.

'What emerges from the conflicts which result I leave you to read for yourself, but read it you must, for this is a remarkable work. A subject which is usually forbidden is here raised to the level of poetry and art. If it is autobiographical, as one must suspect, then hurrah for Mr Ashley, for having the courage of his experiences. And hurrah for Mr Dachs, for his gift of unearthing the talents of others!'

The rest of the article went on to explain what the reviewer considered to be the 'inner meaning' of my book, and I felt that he was no longer really talking about my work but his own conception, for interpretation is invariably something other than the author himself conceived.

I found this article both gratifying and slightly embarrassing, because of its high praise, but it was at least positive, a few of the other reviews, mainly those appearing in obscure or partisan publications, were hostile towards the homosexual content of the book. I had expected this kind of attack, it was obvious that it would come, nonetheless it was painful, as all adverse criticism is for all artists.

I was not afraid of being called a salacious writer but I wished to be considered a serious one, but it was not the artistic merit of my work which was called into question, the critics agreed that I could write, it was its moral worthiness. Yet there is no justification for a moral bias against homosexuality, whatever its status in law. Animals are at the mercy of their sex, they are at the mercy of all their instincts because they live only within the framework of their desires, but man can choose, therefore all human actions

vicese, and I feel that a literary work can be assessed only on its literary merit and philosophic intention, its content is always and only the material of life.

In the review Maggie showed to me, my work had been superlatively praised, and for that I should have been grateful, but I was not grateful, for while the writer had not especially misunderstood me, and had not been hostile to any of the sexual attitudes I had expressed, he misunderstood writing, and by this I was hurt. I suppose that the outline of the story was close enough to the story of my own experiences to be called 'autobiographical', but it was not autobiographical, and he could not know the meaning or purpose of what I had written. All fiction is derived from experience, there is really no-where else to derive it from, but it is not the actual experience of the writer's life or it is history. The difference between a writer of fiction and a writer of fact is that the creative artist possesses the imagination to project himself into the selves of others, to nurture and develop the seeds of lives other than his own, of which all are in all of us, into semblances of whole lives, or he is no writer at all. He draws on himself, he takes fragments of lives he has observed or known, and from this material creates his characters, but he does not imitate, he gives birth; he is not a camera, but a god. What I had done was to take an approximation of the story of my adult life and show it as it might have been, but when one does that, one takes the risk that the imprecise memories and imaginations of others may take it for actuality, and this was what had happened. And I had written it, not as an end in itself, but for a purpose.

This misunderstanding on the part of the reviewer, however well-intentioned, prepared me for what happened next. Maggie said to me:

'Darling, isn't it wonderful? I knew you would do it! Now you can be independent of everyone, and everywhere we go people will know us—Oh, it will be good to be your wife now! But tell me, the girl in the story, is she—me?'

This was not at all the kind of reaction I had desired. I did not want to be known, except by my work. I wanted Maggie to be affected by my writing, and not by what other people thought of what I wrote.

'Will people recognise her as me, and will they—like me, if they do?'

'Don't worry, Maggie, read it, please,' I urged.

'Very well. Where is it? Give me a copy.'

I was obliged to admit that I didn't possess one, that Dachs had published without telling me when he was going to do so, and, when she asked, that I had not yet received my money from him.

'And do you think he will ever pay you?' she asked.

'He will now, Maggie. He must,' I answered.

'I hope you are right,' she said, and left me alone.

Later that same day, I received two copies of the book from Dachs, with his compliments, that was all. I gave one to Maggie. A few hours later, she came to me, in tears.

'This girl you have written about, she is a distorted caricature of me! You have used me, you have wilfully altered and changed things so that I become horrible! Why do you hate me, Joseph, or is it all women you hate?' And she continued to weep.

'Maggie, you're wrong!' I said. 'What do you think I was trying to do?'

'You want to make me wrong and yourself right! You are just taking your revenge because you cannot change me. Oh Joseph, how could you do it? She begins as—an attractive and sophisticated woman, and ends as a milksop, while your Alfred is a fool to start with and ends as a superior creature who rejects everything that is different to him—You just hate everyone!'

'Maggie, that is just the opposite of what I wanted to convey—'

'Then you have failed, and I don't wonder, because you are perhaps very different from what you imagine yourself to be!'

'Perhaps I am,' I admitted, sadly.

'But I,' she said, 'am the same as I always was! Even if I hate your book, I realise that it is well written, and it is already on the way to becoming a success. I like success. I love it perhaps above everything else, and I have never pretended otherwise. Now I can have what I always wanted. If you are considered a great writer, then I shall be the great writer's wife, even if your portrait of me makes me appear

worldly!'

I felt that these words of Maggie's would destroy me, it was the bitterest blow I had ever received. I had not worked for fame or success, but for acceptance and understanding, and my work had produced an almost total misunderstanding on Maggie's part. What I had tried to do had been a very simple thing, but she had misinterpreted me because she could not find an image in the book with which she wished to identify. It seemed to me that she could not shed the idea of glamour, which is a delusion, as I knew well from my experience with Dachs. Those who feel that the world outside themselves is everything and they are nothing often desire above all to be glamorous, because then they feel themselves to be a highly-prized object in a world of objects of differing value. Maggie was a glamorous woman, and she was not to be condemned for that, but I wanted her not to value glamour. By creating a woman just sufficiently recognisable as her, who deliberately abandons glamour for love, I wanted to show her the worthlessness of false values, but instead I had had the opposite effect. She was right, I had failed, and I would almost rather my book had been a total failure than have failed with her.

Sarah had not spoken to me at all since the publication of the book, but one evening at dinner she said:

'I have just read your book, Joseph, or all of it that I could bear to read.'

'And what do you think of it?' I asked.

'I think you are mad – quite literally insane, certifiable!'

I was astounded.

'But why?' I asked.

'You try to show that a homosexual is a superior kind of man to normal men. That seems to me to be like the man who thinks he is Napoleon, he is alone in his opinion and is kept locked up away from other people. In my view – and I must say it merely confirms what I have always thought about you, you too should be kept locked away, so that you do not spread these warped and disgusting ideas—'

'That is not what I was trying to do, and homosexuality is neither an illness nor disgusting—'

'Perhaps not to you, but it is to all healthy, normal people, those who are not perverted, and how Maggie—'

divorce him?'

'You are a selfish, spoiled and destructive creature!' I began, and then, seeing Maggie's eyes, I stopped.

I read in them not that she agreed with Sarah but that she was hurt and shaken by my having exposed both of us to such hostility, whether from her mother or from anyone else. She wanted social acceptance, and I had thrown away from myself the veil of half-acceptance by the people she liked and who liked her, who had not been able to attack me too sharply until now because my work had pleased them even if my life and personality had not, and which made her feel vulnerable too. Instead of doing as I had wished to do, showing her the falseness of attitudes such as Sarah's, I had provoked her fear, I had hurt her, and I felt that she might become, not only alienated from me, but alien to me, a stranger capable of betraying me to those who would destroy me. We finished the meal in silence, then I said :

'Please, both of you, can we not try to love one another?'

'You cannot love both men and women,' said Sarah.

'I understand what you are saying,' I replied, 'but you are wrong about me, as Maggie can tell you. It is you who make the mistake of not loving both sexes, or either sex. If we do not love each other, we will destroy each other.'

'Better to be destroyed, than corrupted!' Sarah flung at me, and walked away. Without a word to me, Maggie went after her.

The following morning, Dachs telephoned. I was astonished, for he had never done so before, and I did not expect that he ever would.

'Joseph, my boy, congratulations on my greatest success—ha, ha!'

'Dachs,' I said, 'this is a pleasant surprise. I am glad to hear from you, I want to ask you a question—or rather, two questions—'

'Anything, my boy!'

'Have you read the book?'

'Of course.'

'And what kind of impression has it made on you?'

'Impression? But you know! I agree absolutely with the critics—our greatest success!'

'Is that all?'

'Oh, you mean your message? Joseph, you are an idealist, an aspect of your personality which does not appeal to me in life, but which we all find charming in literature. Mind you, if you were not greatly talented, now that you have become such a serious writer you might also have become tedious. But fortunately you have the talent to carry off whatever you please.'

'You mean—you forgive me my seriousness—'

'That might be one way of putting it, yes.'

'That is not enough.'

'What more do you want?'

'For you to take me seriously.'

'But I do, I take your success very seriously!'

'My success, yes, but not me—not my ideas!'

'Come and see me, Joseph, we'll talk.'

'And the second question I want to ask—'

'Yes?'

'You offered me any terms I wish.'

'Come to me, Joseph—come and talk—'

'All right—but do you really want me to, after last time?'

'Have I ever not wanted to see you?'

'No,' I admitted, 'but are we friends?'

'Of course! When will you come?'

'Tomorrow—at two.'

'Right. We shall see each other then—'

I cannot deny that I was pleased at Dachs' friendly tone, but I was also bitterly disappointed. He too had been confirmed in his existing attitude by what I had written. He had not changed at all, as I had hoped he would. I wanted him to care, for me, for people, for anyone, but he merely felt benevolent towards me because he too loved success and I had been the means by which he had obtained it. I felt more strongly than ever, that it is disgusting to value people for what one gains from them, or through them, and not for their own sakes.

I was aware that, even now, he had not actually given me any money nor made me any definite offer. While I was apprehensive about this, not for myself but for the sake of my relationship with Maggie, I did not see how he could avoid giving me the ordinary terms for a writer, as I wished him to do. He had had the kind of success he had lived for,

mind of it. Not knowing what to expect, I told her of the conversation. I was more than surprised when she said :

'I'm coming with you.'

'And do you think it will help, if you do?' I asked. 'Remember what happened before. Do you feel any differently towards him now?'

'Perhaps I shall help. You are too honest for diplomacy, Joseph, and this situation needs a little tact. You know, you may have made him—worse.'

'In what way?'

'Now that you have fulfilled his hopes, now he has gained something through you that he could not have gained in any other way, he may want more, he might try harder than ever to get you back, or to destroy you if he feels he cannot have you.'

'I will not deny that could be true, and if it is?' I asked.

'We must try to win him over,' she replied.

'Just to get what we want, you mean?'

'After all,' she continued, almost abstractedly, 'it is better to have him as a friend than as an enemy. Perhaps I can help you to be friends with him.'

'That would be wonderful, Maggie, that is just what I want! What do you propose to do?'

'I'll think of a way.'

'He sounded extremely well-disposed. There may be no difficulty at all if only it *can* be!'

I was not sure of Maggie's motives, and I knew that she had not been moved by my writing to change; nor, for that matter, had Dachs. But it could be that, despite themselves, they *had* changed, that Maggie's feeling that it was better to be friends was deeper than she herself knew, and that goodwill towards Dachs, in his present mood, might show him that he too would be better off to have Maggie as a friend or at least, as someone who was not an implacable foe.

It was in this spirit of some hope that I went, with an undercurrent of pleasure because, after all, I had proved my artistic independence of Dachs, but I knew that this meeting would also prove the success or failure of what my book most deeply meant to me; if the three of us could be recon-

dream.

Maggie, without make-up, looked severely beautiful and self-contained, socially impeccable, and above all valuable, in a simple dress and coat of some soft and delicate stuff. This time, we went together.

CHAPTER TWO

We were greeted with deference by the valet, who expressed a hypocritical pleasure at seeing me again, and then we were offered drinks by the maid, who avoided looking at me and seemed awed by Maggie, and who asked us to be comfortable while we waited for Dachs to appear. This was the kind of arrangement Dachs made only for his most important visitors, those he wished or needed to impress, and he knew that I knew it. I was pleased because it was his most civilised type of behaviour, and Maggie was almost disarmed, for it was how she expected to be treated by a host who knew her value. But I was still apprehensive. Dachs was the kind of man who is most to be feared when he is most affable, he laid plans for social conquest only when there was difficulty to be overcome and when he had most at stake. It was possible he wanted merely to show how friendly, how well-disposed he could be, but for that I felt he would have relied solely on his charm. He was not. I thought, making amends, he seemed to be out to flatter. When he appeared, dressed in a silk Chinese dressing-gown, he apologised and said that he had not been very well, but that he was extremely pleased to see us, and he complimented Maggie on her elegance and beauty. I had never before heard him compliment a woman, it seemed to me that this was indeed a remarkable break with precedent, and Maggie was genuinely charmed. Then he turned to me:

'My boy, you must allow me to say "I told you so," even —"I made you so".'

'Mr Dachs,' said Maggie, with a smile 'If you say that, you virtually force Joseph to prove that you did *not* make him. Would it not be much better to give him his credit, and merely to say, "I believed in you, I am your friend"?'

I realised at once that what Maggie imagined to be diplo-

badly. In order not to allow matters to get out of hand from the beginning, I said :

'Maggie, I have to acknowledge great help from Dachs. This time no-one can say I owe him more than any writer should, and so I do not at all mind him saying that he made me, up to the point where I may say : "I made myself".'

'I am afraid, Joseph,' said Dachs, 'you are mistaken. Oh, I am disappointed too, but people are saying—you must harden yourself to this—that you and I wrote *this* book together, too, but we are trying to prevent it from being known—'

'But it's completely false!' I burst out.

'I know, I know, but there it is. I have been trying to think what we can do about it, but '

'It doesn't matter,' I broke in.

'Oh.' He stared at me. 'I thought it would disturb you,' he said frankly.

'No. I don't care what they say any more.'

He continued to look at me, strangely. For the first time, I saw defeat in his eyes briefly, for a moment, nonetheless it was there—for he knew now that I really no longer needed him, that I could be independent, could stand by myself as far as I wished to do. I knew that this meant he must either acknowledge my right to be free, or fight harder than he had ever done to get me back, and I longed with all my might for him to take the former course.

'Dachs,' I said, 'I've come mainly for two reasons—'

'Yes?' he inquired, politely.

'The first is to see whether—you have changed in any way.'

'And have I?' he smiled.

'You do not look very well, and I am sorry, but apart from that I don't yet know.'

'And the second?'

'We must discuss money.'

'I have some rather distressing news for you on that score too, Joseph.'

'What do you mean?'

'I have just been obliged to file a petition of bankruptcy.'

'Bankruptcy!' Maggie ejaculated. 'So that is why you have withheld the money!'

'No,' he said, 'I have not withheld anything, I have merely been rather extravagant.'

'Dachs,' I said, 'I'm sorry. Of course, in the circumstances, there is no question of my asking you for anything for the moment.'

'Thank you, Joseph. But you know my way of living, I may be solvent again, even rich, in a few days. Even now, I feel my little extravagance was worth it. I met -a certain young man. That very day I bought him a few presents, rather expensive presents—in fact, they cost thousands of pounds. I did not manage to recover the cost, my last financial venture brought in very little—'

'You gave away *our* money!' accused Maggie.

'My dear young woman,' said Dachs, in the old tone of condescension he habitually used to women, 'money will come in from Joseph's last book, and he is more than welcome to it, but he had none before that, it was all gone, and really he knew it.'

Maggie turned to me.

'Did you know, Joseph? Did you deliberately deceive me?'

'No, Maggie, but he means that, while I thought there was money left which belonged to me, I genuinely thought so, I was not really sure—'

'You are as bad as he is, Joseph. I believed in you, but now I think perhaps Sarah is right, perhaps you *are* corrupt!'

'Maggie,' I began.

'No, don't say anything more, you have said enough. It is not so much the money I care about, although surely we will need it, but that you should have led me to believe Joseph, you mean well, but years of this person's influence have done you harm. I am leaving, and I don't know whether I want you to come back to the house!' And with that, she left.

'Dachs,' I said, 'you see what this has caused. How do I know you are telling the truth now?'

'I was not.'

'You were lying just now?'

'I am not bankrupt. I simply wanted to show you who is really your friend. She deserts you when you have no money, but I—I welcome you with open arms! What do you care if she will not have you, come back to me!'

So it had been a bid to take me from Maggie, a bid which may have succeeded in destroying our relationship. The publication of my book had made matters infinitely worse, and I had failed, utterly failed, to produce harmony between

said to him?

'And is it also not true that I have no money, that it is all gone?'

'If you come back to me, you can have whatever you please—'

'I am not a prostitute, Dachs, and I cannot be bought by you or anyone else. I left you for Maggie because I loved her and did not love you, and I have not sued you because I did not believe in forcing you and I do not believe in it now If you have any consideration for me at all you will tell Maggie that you lied.'

'She will not believe anything I say now,' he answered. 'Besides, there is one thing you have omitted, your desire for me. Whatever you may want to be like, you still want me, and you always have. I defy you to say you do not want me to make love to you now!'

It was true, he still had the power to excite me, but now he could not move me by this means because I had realised something. It is a fact of my nature, and of all powerfully sexual natures, that I can always afterwards be attracted to a person with whom I have once had a sexual relationship, if they have not lost their power to attract, but I had chosen Maggie and not him, and I would not submit to my desire to give in to him.

'Yes,' I admitted, 'I can still want you, but what you do not realise is that that is no longer a way by which you can influence me, because I have chosen otherwise Even if Maggie were to reject me now I should not return to you, not because I dislike you more but because I have come to feel differently about you. I feel sorry for you, you destroy yourself with everything you do. Please, Dachs, I appeal to you as one human being to another, stop trying to get me back, trying to destroy what I am trying to build -let me go!'

'If you leave here now, Joseph, I shall never speak to you again.'

'Very well,' I answered, 'I admit I have failed. I may have lost both you and Maggie, and that is what I cared about, but I leave with pity and regret, with as much love as I can give you.'

'And I say,' said Dachs, 'that on your own, you will rot!'

I think he was sincere in what he said, that he really believed that without him I would not survive. I myself, at

had been his final attempt to separate me from Maggie, he had had to show me that I was more able to depend on him than on her, and while he may have succeeded in alienating her from me, he had destroyed the connection with me, and he knew it. We had finally come to the parting of the ways, and it was the last time I was ever to see him. I feel sure that he, too, knew it was our last meeting, and as I said 'Goodbye, Dachs,' he stretched out his hand towards me in a gesture which was half a plea, and he looked like an old man.

CHAPTER THREE

We can love a person who does not love us, and we can be loved by someone we do not love, for the gift of the self which is the essence of love is rarely mutual, although both the giver and the receiver are without fail transformed by the gift, as both Dachs and I had been. I maintained that he had not loved me, and that I had never loved him, but now that I knew it was over, that the bond was dissolved, I knew that really we had loved, but that the love had not been pure. We had joined our lives for a period of time and during that time I had become a writer and he had experienced what was to be the last great passion of his life. How well I felt I understood him then! A man such as he cannot give up passion, for really, without knowing it, he lives through relationship, and to him the essence of relationship is that moment when the other, entirely at his mercy, is utterly fascinated and completely enslaved, while he is completely free to do with his slave whatever he may wish. He could renounce this strong but imprisoning pleasure for a generosity of feeling which could free him and the other, but he had not, I had failed to help him bring it about, and it might be that, just because the problem of our relationship had solved itself by coming to an end, I came to realise what I wished to do.

I rang Maggie, and told her that Dachs had been lying.

'He wanted to separate us, to prove that you would not stand by me if I had no money,' I said.

'It isn't that.' She sounded almost resigned.

don't suppose he offered any money?'

'No,' I admitted, 'he didn't.'

'You knew he would not. Why did you do it?'

'Because I wanted to change him, but I have failed. I shan't see him again.'

'That is all very well, but will you sue him?'

'Do you want me to come home, Maggie?'

'Although you say not,' she said, 'I think you really prefer Dachs.'

'No, Maggie, I can promise you, I don't want him.'

'And the money?'

'Maggie, I want to come home and talk to you.'

'I told Sarah what happened. She says if you try to come back, I should get the police, or have you put away.'

'Do you believe you should do that?'

'No—I believe you, I still believe *in* you—but what's to become of us?'

'Shall I come and talk to you?'

'Yes, come. I'll tell Sarah to go out for a while.'

I was not afraid of anything that Sarah might do, or persuade Maggie to do, although I knew that she was very far from being a friend, because I did not believe that Maggie would be persuaded by her to do anything she did not want to do, but I had nothing to tell Maggie which would make her feel happier or more secure. I had made the greatest effort of my life, and despite the approbation I had received I felt depleted, emptied. Even if Maggie were to continue to accept me as her husband, and if I were to achieve an income from my writing, we might be about to embark on the opposite kind of life to that which I wanted, Maggie would become more and not less worldly. Dachs I could no longer directly affect, but Maggie I had to try to give whatever would help her to develop her values, or she would be lost What was the use of my life, if the person with whom I was most closely connected, whom I still loved and wanted more than anyone else, could not be helped by me, if I could not direct one person towards a worthy existence? I believe that if one can pick up a leaf from the ground and know it for what it really is, one is safe, but to own palaces, and not to value the leaf, is destruction. Maggie had hated the effect my writing had on me, and I deplored that it had not had the effect I desired on her. Perhaps she had been

right and I wrong. I was so wrapped in myself at that moment that I almost fell over a child playing with a little dog in the street. He too was oblivious of his surroundings, but he was concentrating on the animal. I watched them, and I felt envious of the warmth and spontaneous happiness of the little boy. I felt that in the process of writing, whereas this was something I had tried to propagate, really I had lost it. Perhaps, I thought, I am not really a writer at all?

Into my writing, in this last book I had poured my hopes, my aspirations, my ideas, my dreams really with the major purpose of influencing the people with whom I was connected and the failure to do this had left my work without aim. I would not write for money only, and the fact that I might reach other people whom I did not know, kindred minds, seemed of secondary importance to me compared to the effect I wished to have on those I did know minds unlike my own. And then, when I said to myself: 'I am no longer a writer', a change happened in me people I knew or knew of and did not normally think about suddenly assumed a fresh importance. I thought of the little Danish maid, and I wanted to say to her: 'It was not to be between you and me, but you are young and beautiful, and you will be loved.' I thought of the valet, and the hot resentful looks he sometimes gave me when he thought I was not looking, and to him I wanted to say: 'I shall never again come between you and your desire for your master. I wish you happiness.' For some reason I thought of a tramp I had once seen sleeping on a street-bench, wearing half-a-dozen filthy overcoats one on top of the other, his head sunk so low into the collars that it was completely invisible. When I had passed him, I was conscious of a barrier between him and myself, who or what he was I did not know, and I could not have found out because I feared to be contaminated by him, that perhaps he was diseased or could infect me with disease. It had not really been a social barrier between us, it was— my writing. I was clinging to my writing as something which needed me more than he did. But now I could see that the possibility of disease, even if it existed, did not matter. If I liked a tramp, I should be his friend, and if his friendship were even to destroy me, to result in my death, even that did not matter, because the distinction between life and death is merely the result of the limit of what we can possibly know while we are alive, and we should not be

afraid of the unknown or even the unknowable, all that matters is to follow our constructive feelings.

I could let my writing go, but could Maggie let me do it? She had not wanted me to write while I was working on the book, she had done her best to stop me, but that was because she wanted me to concentrate on her; like many people, it was the results of work she wished to enjoy. And the result had been what she confessed was the thing she loved most, success. That time, which I still remembered with pain and guilt, when I had pushed her down the stairs, she had asked me what I needed her for. To that, then and now, I could have only one answer. Whatever my original motive for wanting Maggie, I had come to love her, by which I meant that she herself, and the effect her personality had on everything she touched, spontaneously made me want to give myself to her, and I did not feel wronged in the process. But I was not sure what her need was of me. I knew she liked me to make love to her, but was it merely that she liked my body? I knew also that she appreciated my writing, but was it, in the end, because she thought I would be successful, and famous? And what of money, how would she react to the fact that, without writing, I would not only be penniless but have no means of earning an income? If she had come to me saying . 'Joseph, I have nothing, will you take me as I am?' I knew that I should have said yes, it seemed ludicrous to me to value people, ultimately, for what they have, but she cared, or said she cared, as much for other things as for people, it was possible that she could not love me apart from certain inessential attributes, of which success was perhaps the chief And if this were true, if she rejected me now, what would I do? Then I knew that while I should feel bitterly depleted by her loss, I should not be crushed by it, I would find my way to go on living, without her. Can't you see, Maggie, I thought, love is the ground and the true riches of life; first love, then everything else, or nothing else, what matters?

When I reached home, Maggie was waiting for me. She was looking out of the living-room window, I could see her from the street. She waved to me, but it was merely a gesture, and I could see, to my sorrow, that she was very unhappy.

She turned as I entered the room.

'It's going to rain,' she remarked, irrelevantly.

'Yes, it does seem like it.'

'What now, Joseph, what did you want to tell me?'

'First of all, do you intend to listen to Sarah?'

'No, of course not. Surely you realise that I know she is jealous of us?'

'I wasn't sure, but I am very glad you do. What do you want of me, now?'

'Mainly that you mean it when you say you will never see Dachs again, that you swear you mean it!'

'I swear—'

She threw herself into my arms.

'Oh, Joseph, can we be happy, do you think?'

'I know we can,' I answered, 'if you can accept what I am going to tell you now—'

'What is it?' she was frightened.

'That I have given up writing. I am not going to write another book.'

'Given it up—but why?'

'You didn't like it very much when I *was* writing.'

'Is that the reason? But surely—'

'No, that is not the reason. The reason is that I've failed, Maggie. Oh I know, my book has been well received but by whom? Critics people I don't know, or don't care about. But not by you. You hated it—'

'But you can write other things, books I may like much more—'

'No, Maggie. If you don't understand this one, you will hate the others, too. It's difficult to explain, but the thought of giving up writing has freed me, to be more myself. What you felt, that writing was changing me, was true, and it was not for the better. Now I feel I can be whatever I please.'

'And what about money?'

'I shall find a way to earn some.'

'If you don't write,' she said sadly, 'you won't be the man I married.'

'You thought I was ceasing to be that because I *was* writing.'

Then, unexpectedly, she began to cry.

'Joseph, I feel so lost! You are so very impractical, and what do I say to Sarah now?'

'Does she have to live here, with us?'

'No, she doesn't. But if I tell her to go now, she will never forgive either of us, she'll be an implacable enemy. And if I did not have some money, we should be tramps—'

'It's funny you should say that,' I replied. 'I shouldn't really mind, being a tramp.'

'But I should —very much. I couldn't live that way.'

'No, but don't worry, you won't have to. Don't cry, and let me go to my room now, and in the morning tell me whether you can accept me just as I am, without writing, or money, or success, or anything other than myself at all.' And I went upstairs.

I did not know what would happen, whether Maggie would choose to stay with me or what I would do when she had chosen, but I felt I might have achieved, by giving up writing, what I had not been able to achieve with it. I was prepared to give up anything, to do anything, for the sake of harmony; my one regret was Dachs. I had to regard the relationship with him as something uncompleted but sealed away from me now, something I could not touch or affect. It was the fact that I could not communicate with him, could not reach or move him, which hurt. He had become a factor in the world, outside my values, and while I did not believe that he was beyond reach I had had to give up the attempt His world had suddenly become remote from mine, we would not touch at any point, and I felt there was something wrong with this, for consciously or not we were bound to touch in some way, for the world, even the universe, is one. I would try to make my life such that whatever emanated from me, whatever subtle waves spread out from my life into the universe would, reaching him, affect him in such manner as I would wish.

That night, I could feel Maggie's sorrow through the house. But something was born from it, too I knew that she would not be sorrowing if she were not really my Maggie, if she had not decided that, if she must suffer, she would suffer with me. I vowed that I would do all I could to make her happy.

The following morning I went downstairs early, before anyone else was up. I found a letter addressed to me, from Dachs. It contained his good wishes, and a cheque for a thousand pounds. He said that this was in lieu of anything he might owe me, and that any further royalties would be paid directly to my bank account. He also added that he no longer considered himself to be my friend

This move on his part, so entirely unexpected, made me feel not happy, but defeated. The money would make things very much easier, it could not fail to please Maggie, but he

knew, he knew very well, that I would sooner have his friendship than any money, and I knew that what he wrote was final, he would never again think in terms of friendship towards me, merely in terms of business. This was what I had asked him for, but it had not really been my true self speaking, it had been the result of my relationship with Maggie and the need to care for her. There was nothing I could do, at most I could write and thank him, but by this gesture he had asserted his values over mine. He was now entirely affirmed by what he had done because he had acted in accordance with what he believed, and generously, whereas I had gained my money, really by pressure, and forfeited his friendship, even the right to friendship. Of course, it had been he who had caused this, but I had not been able to show that the power of love was greater than the power of his money.

I went to Maggie, who was in bed, but awake.

'Joseph,' she said, 'I've thought it over, and I think we should stay as we are, for the moment. Let us see what happens.'

I showed her the letter and the cheque, and her face lit up with a smile.

'There, I was right to trust you after all. He knew he could not get away with it. Even Sarah won't be able to say anything now—'

I kissed her, and left the room, sad with a sorrow which she noticed, but did not comprehend.

CHAPTER FOUR

I had achieved my material aim since meeting Maggie, but nothing more. I felt that, as yet, nothing had really changed, and I was right, it was just that more of what was good and bad had been realised, yet nothing had really been resolved. But there were undercurrents of feeling in the house which made me realise that it was imperative to resolve the problem of myself and Maggie. Sarah, probably because there was very little that she could say, said nothing at all to me now, and I could not persuade her to speak to me; she had hardened against me completely. I did not suggest to Maggie that we turn her out of the house because I realised that really she had nowhere to go. Despite her

liking of social life she had no intimates, and we were her only relatives. She would have been obliged to live in an hotel, and her life would have been entirely empty. In that circumstances, no doubt she would quickly find herself another husband, but as she was, a marriage would almost certainly end as a repetition of previous failures. Without her needing to say so, I realised that Maggie wanted her to stay with us to save her from herself.

I also realised that, by giving up writing, I had put Maggie in the position where she could not see her future, and this made her afraid. She often hinted that I should eventually start to write again, and once she told me that she felt it was her fault that I had ceased to write, for she had tried to stop me. It was not her doing, but I knew what she felt. She had been jealous of me and now she was guilty, because she felt that her jealousy had destroyed my desire to write. Sarah, unless she changed, could not accept me, and perhaps wished to hurt me; Maggie was afraid that she had hurt me, and she felt that she had no direction. And I, while I wanted Maggie and Sarah not to judge and to realise that they had nothing to fear either from or for me, and I understood the urgency of the need for them to realise this, felt that I was beginning to live a life of freedom and joy, by which I meant that, for the first time, I could see how to go beyond myself, transcend myself, by means of my own free choices, or I imagined that I could do this because I had given up writing. Although little had really changed in the relationship between Maggie and me since the beginning, I had changed the basis of my own life, and whereas previously I had felt burdened, now I felt a lightness and ease of spirit such as I had never known before.

Freedom is a rarefied air, and not everyone is willing or perhaps able to breathe it. Thrown into a universe where everything we do needs our consent, most people appear to choose that which frightens them least, in case they wilfully destroy themselves. But freedom *is* frightening, to go forward into the unknown can be terrifying, and yet only if we can do this can we truly live. To one who wishes to be free there is nothing quite so frightening as slavery, and it has become the most common form of human existence - slavery to work, to family, to authority, to possessions. I know the reason for this. I may have been, indeed I partly was, mistaken in what I felt at this time, and that mistake could have destroyed me, yet it does not matter, it is the

inescapable risk. Most people are afraid that such mistakes are fatal, therefore they make the only really fatal mistake, they never try their wings, they remain earth-bound. Thus the multitudes of virtually undifferentiated men and women who inhabit the cities and towns of the earth rush hither and thither to work, to play, to sleep, at the behest of the masters of the world who are masters only because of the acquiescence of the millions, because each of them is afraid to stretch his wings and fly, and be guided only by his own being and his own choice. And why do we accept this non-life? Because we see that everyone else appears to be doing so too, we are encouraged by the collective voice of mankind to abandon ourselves and become subservient

In my writing I had tried to warn and to guide, now I decided to abandon the futility of work, of striving, just to be myself, to let my life take me by surprise

At this time I often stayed awake at night and made love to Maggie in the early hours, as she seemed to like me to do, and I began to talk to her in the night, to say whatever came into my mind to say. I loved to stroke her muscular belly, that smooth silky belly, and once, as I did so, I said:

'There is such peace in you, Maggie, but it's all inside yourself, you keep it all to yourself Give it out, give it to me, to anyone, distribute it, why cling to it?'

'You would not like it if I slept with lots of people, Joseph, nor would I—'

'I don't meant that. Do you never pass a stranger and, in your imagination, kiss him? Do you not feel love, hate, anger, desire, drawn out of you as you walk along a street?'

'I think I should be mad if I felt like that—'

'Am *I* mad?' I asked.

'Sometimes I think you are.'

'Why, what makes you think so, does Sarah say so?'

'You say I am peaceful Well, I say *you* are violent. You do not realise it, but you are violent by nature, and could be destructive, that is why I sometimes fear you are mad '

She was wrong, I am neither violent nor mad, but I am not reasonable. Of what use is reason without love? Love first, then reason. Maggie was reasonable, but she was anxious, afraid. I was not able to say to her that she was wrong because I had pushed her down the stairs My unreasonableness sometimes led me to extravagance, but it could also lead me to a rich, overflowing existence, whereas

her reasonableness would lead her merely towards the collective norm, the normal negativity of our time.

'Maggie,' I said to her, and it is the only cruel thing I remember saying, 'even if violence and madness were the price of life, real life, and they are not, I would pay it—'

'I know, Joseph, I know,' she cried. 'That is why you frighten me.'

'But I shall never again be violent with you.'

'Oh, I hope not!'

And I never was.

Somehow, our conversations in the night led back and back again to Maggie's fear and our misunderstandings of each other. How I longed for us to understand each other, but we could not, not then.

'Maggie,' I said, as I lay beside her one night, 'you are beautiful—'

'Thank you,' she answered, but she was trembling.

'Why do you tremble?' I asked.

'I don't know,' she said, pathetically.

'Are you unhappy?'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

'Where are we going, Joseph? What will you do with your life?'

'I *am* alive.'

'Is that enough?'

'What else is there?'

'There's doing things. I was brought up to do things.'

'What things?'

'With a little encouragement from you, I could paint again—and you should write.'

'Sometimes,' I said, 'I think I want to be the only person in the world to do nothing, *really* to do nothing, which is the most difficult thing of all to do. Anyone can keep busy.'

'They say the mad sometimes sit absolutely still for days on end—'

'The mad—the mad! Are you convinced I am mad, Maggie?'

'I'm just frightened.'

'Yes, I know. And if I hold you, like this, are you still frightened, Maggie?'

'Not so much, but—it doesn't really solve anything, does it?'

'No,' I admitted, 'No. Maggie I love you.'

'And I you,' she replied.

'Then,' I asked, 'What's wrong?'

'That I'm lost and you cannot help me.'

And that is how it was that our fear of each other grew despite my trying to prevent it.

One evening Maggie persuaded me to go to a party with her. Sometimes, although rarely, my need for social life overcomes my repugnance of the type of social life which, for the most part, is all that exists, and I try to partake. My head began to ache as soon as I arrived, and almost everyone seemed to want to congratulate me on my book although when I looked I could not find one face with the spark of livingness in it, they were all artificial, like people in masks.

Then, for no conscious reason, I asked the hostess if I could make a speech to the guests. She seemed pleased, perhaps she thought it would relieve the boredom, and she announced me. I stood at the end of the room and everyone became silent. I glanced at Maggie, and I could see the apprehension in her eyes. I stood there without saying a word for several minutes, waiting for what I should say to enter my mind of its own accord. I watched the expressions on people's faces change from smiling expectancy to bewilderment, for most people believe that speech is manufactured, and not, as I was trying to allow mine to do, merely allowed to flow. Maggie was looking at me in horror. Then I said:

'Most of you people seem to have read my book. Can one of you please tell me why he thinks I wrote it?'

'Surely that is, if anything, for you to tell us,' said a voice.

'No,' I replied, 'you say you liked it, but what was it you liked? I will tell you why I wrote it, it was so that you, and you—and you—should cease to lead fruitless mechanical lives, and perhaps for other reasons, too, but now I think I must have been joking. You think that because you have read my book, I have succeeded, but I say, because you did not understand it, I have failed! I have given up writing, for you do not understand,' I looked straight at Maggie, 'and I may go to live among tramps!'

I walked away from the angry buzz of conversation which came from my audience, and Maggie followed me into the street.

'Joseph, how could you! Why did you have to insult them? How can I hold up my head amongst them again?'

'I merely told them the truth, Maggie.'

'The truth! Is it so bad that they appreciate your work without understanding it?'

'Yes, because they are unchanged.'

'Well, *I* believe you are talented, but I do not understand you and I do not intend to change! But I don't know how much longer I can go on loving you.'

'Whatever you do, Maggie, I know exactly how long I shall go on loving you.'

'How long?'

'For ever, Maggie,' I said.

The following morning I went for a walk by myself. Despite everything, how sweet it seemed to be alive! It was a cool, brilliant day, and I felt in my bones the omnipotence of the earth, the trees stood, mute witnesses that the earth would always conquer. Man's mighty efforts, the grandeur of building and the horror of his machines seemed what they are, an impudent gesture on the edge of the earth's crust. What did it matter if I could not convey to anyone the significance I felt to exist in life? I felt as I had once felt when I visited a zoo and heard people laugh at a great black gorilla who glowered at them, not in hate but in anger, because they had caged and tormented him, that man's unwarranted pretentions in the face of life showed the extent of the insult he gives to himself.

The day demands and the night soothes. O man, who lives neither with day nor night, but in realms of your own imagining, cease this grief you miscall living and make your peace with the earth and the wonders thereon! Who can reason or argue with life, or name it? We are the unknown fruits of the dust, and to the dust we must make our obeisance. If the universe bursts asunder, if the planets crack and the stars to cease to move along ordered courses, we have but one life only to live, one death to die, and with whatever lust of life or love we may manage, let us live it, then die in peace!

I noticed an old man, a tramp, little more than a bundle of dirty rags and a fuzz of grey hair, sitting in a doorway reading a book. He looked up and saw me looking at him.

'You busy?' he called out.

'No,' I replied, 'I'm just walking.'

'Thought so. Come an' sit 'ere, an' talk ter me.'

'All right,' I said, and sat beside him.

'See this book?' He showed me the cover, it was a tattered copy of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. 'You read it?'

'Yes,' I replied.

'What you fink of it?'

'It's about another world than ours, but it's a great book. I think he wants us to realise that everyone is important.'

'Yus. But 'e calls it *War and Peace*, an' it's all abaht war. 'E finks war's more interestin' than peace, but I don't.'

'Neither do I.'

'There y'are, I knew we'd get on. Some people fink they like fightin'—fightin', fightin', is what they've bin brought up to. But what's the use of it? If yer fight, somebody's 'urt or killed, an' yet yer can't die ter live, yer've got ter *live* ter live!'

'That's what I think,' I agreed. 'And what can we do about it?'

'I tell 'em! Stop workin' an' start livin', I say!'

'And do they listen?'

'Somebody's bahnd to. An' if they don't, I'll still go on sayin' it. Yer know, years ago I worked in a factory. That was 'ard, 'ard an' miserable, but I 'ad a wife. She used ter go aht scrubbin' in the mornins', one day she caught a chill, an' died, just like that. After that I couldn't work no more. We're bahnd ter die, I said to meself, but I'd sooner die from livin' that from slavin' for a crust. That's when I became a tramp. I'd sooner she was still 'ere, I've always missed 'er, but otherwise I've bin 'appy ever since. The name's Charlie, wot's yours?'

'Pleased to meet you, Charlie,' I said. 'I'm Joseph.'

I liked this old man. He was dirty and he smelled, but his heart was pure and he had a soul. I remembered Anna telling me that I had a soul, and now I knew what she meant, that I cared, as this man cared; his view and mine were akin. I felt that he would understand my book. And then I had an idea.

'I don't live very far from here, Charlie. Would you care to come home with me and let me show you something I've written? I am—I was a writer, and I should like you to see this book.'

'I don't know nuffin' abaht books, only wot I like—'

'That's what I want to know, whether you like it.'

'Wot for?'

'Because I want an honest man's opinion.'

'I ain't that honest.'

'I'll trust you to say what you think.'

'I can do that.'

'Well, that's all I want you to do.'

'O K. I'm game,' he agreed, and we walked back to the house together.

CHAPTER FIVE

As he walked, Charlie rolled from side to side, like a sailor perhaps from years of wearing ill-fitting, broken shoes, and doing so much walking in them. He talked, and told me something of his wandering life. Although he had been born in London, and was a cockney by birth, he said that best of all he loved the country in summer. Sometimes a farmer would give him jobs to do and let him sleep in his barn, he might be given food and a little money and he could save for the winter months. Tramps, he told me, are mostly strange, it is fear of being indoors, of being caged, or else it is merely because they have no family, no-one to look after them, which makes them wander. But some, like himself, have chosen a vagabond life, and he knew that he was better off than he could be any other way. I wondered at his courage, to stay alone and take what came, and I asked him how he could do it.

'It's simple,' he said. 'I don't worry abaht dyin', so I don't worry abaht livin'. If we was animals, we wouldn't know we was gonner die, and we'd live just as we wanted.'

'But we do know,' I said.

'Then know it, an' don't be afraid of it,' he replied, with a smile.

Neither Maggie nor Sarah were about when we got to the house, and I seated him in the living room, which astonished him with its size and elegance but in no way over-awed him, and gave him some breakfast. Then I found some clothes I no longer wanted—a coat, shoes, a jacket—which fitted him, and gave them to him. He had an extraordinary way of taking. Not that he expressed anything extraordinary by word or gesture, but he made me feel that he took pleasure not only in receiving, but in my pleasure at giving. He had less false pride than anyone I have ever known.

Then, when he was comfortable, I told him the story I had written in my book, and read him passages from it, sufficient for him to understand it, and I asked him what he thought I was trying to say.

'It seems to me,' he replied, after a little thought, 'that what you're gettin' at is that if we don't put people first, before anythin', nuthin's any use—'

'That's just it!' I exclaimed. 'Do you know, you are the only person who has seen that!'

'I told yer,' he said, pleased, 'I knew we would get on.'

Then I heard Maggie say:

'I thought I heard voices.' And she entered, staring in horror at Charlie.

'Who—is this?'

'This is my friend, Charlie,' I said.

Maggie simply continued to stare at Charlie, who asked:

'This yer missus?'

'Yes,' I replied, 'this is Maggie, my wife.'

'She's a stunner. Look 'ere, missus,' he said to her, 'Joe 'ere invited me in, to talk abaht 'is book. I'll go nah, if yer want me to.'

'They are Joseph's clothes,' she managed to say.

'Yus, 'e gave 'em to me, but I'll leave 'em if yer like.'

'No Charlie,' I said, 'take them, they are yours. Maggie won't take them from you. Maggie, I thought you might be interested to know that Charlie is the first person who has really understood my book.'

'I should think Charlie is quite good at pleasing some people,' she said. 'It can be a—profession. And now—I don't wish to be rude, Joseph, but will you please ask your—friend—to leave?'

'You *are* being rude, Maggie—'

'I'll go, Joe,' said Charlie. 'I don't blame 'er, women don't like tramps, most women don't. I don't suppose my old woman 'd 'ave me in the 'ouse now, if she was alive. Gawd bless yer, missus, an' it's bin a pleasure to meet yer, Joe—g'bye.' And he went.

Part of me wanted to go off with him; what stopped me was only my love of Maggie, who, I could never leave. His lack of fear had infected me so that I was no longer afraid of what would become of me in this life. I knew that one needed only one's life, and one's love of life, and one could survive, all other possession was really superfluous. But

Maggie needed me, more than she herself knew, and having chosen her I was not free to choose a wandering existence, although I knew now that it was a real possibility for me.

As soon as he had gone, Maggie said to me :

'Joseph, I really believe now there is something wrong with you.'

'Why, Maggie?' I asked, in a voice which surprised myself with its calm. 'That man is entirely harmless.'

'But you are not. I understand what you are doing. There has to be some—male—intimate—in your life! You can no longer have Dachs and so you pick up the first filthy tramp you see in the street and—'

'Maggie,' I interrupted, 'now listen to me! I brought him here because I liked him, because he is a good man, and because I wanted to show him my book, there was no other reason.'

'Anything male—anything male,' repeated Maggie, hardly aware of what she was saying.

'Maggie,' I said, 'pull yourself together! You are overwrought, imagining things—'

Just then, Sarah opened the door, in her dressing-gown.

'What is happening?' she asked.

'Mother,' said Maggie, 'Joseph has just picked up a man —in the street—a tramp—and brought him here—'

Sarah came up to me.

'You filthy—queer!' she hissed.

Then, without anger, as though for her own sake because no-one else would ever do it, I slapped Sarah hard on the cheek. She screamed.

'Maggie—either you throw this madman out of your house—or I call the police!'

The slap had not sobered Sarah, but it seemed to have sobered Maggie.

'Mother, don't do that. Leave us, please, Joseph will not hurt me.'

'No,' said Sarah, I shall stay here to make sure that he does not harm you.'

'Please, Sarah,' begged Maggie. 'This is my house and I want you to leave this room!'

'Very well, but you make a great mistake,' said Sarah, and left us.

'Joseph,' Maggie asked, 'do you want to leave me?'

'No,' I replied.

'Do you want me to leave you?'

'No.'

'Do you think,' she asked, 'that I want to leave you?'

'No.'

'Very well, we must do something about our situation.'

'There is nothing to be done,' I said. 'It is all merely misunderstanding.'

'There are people whose job it is to help in such circumstances—'

'What people?'

'There is someone I know, a doctor, whom I would like you to talk to—'

'I see. You really believe there is something wrong with me?'

'Joseph—the things you believe are not like the things other people believe; the things you do are not like the things other people do; the things you say are not like the things other people say—how do you interpret that?'

'I may be different to other people—'

'And can you be sure,' she asked, 'that that does not mean you are—insane?'

'Yes.'

'How?'

'I am in possession of my mind and faculties. I do no harm to myself or others—'

'And pushing me downstairs? And slapping Sarah's face? And your relationships with men?'

'You know I am not mad, Maggie.'

'Joseph, I believe I still love you, but I am no longer sure of your sanity.'

'In that case, I will see your doctor, I have nothing to fear.'

'That is a great relief to me, Joseph.—I'll phone him at once and you can see him today.'

'It seems you have already discussed me with him.'

'I haven't discussed you, just told him that I wanted you to see him. Forgive me, but I had to speak to someone, and I trust him.'

But I did not, because of his appearance and because of something he said to me. Later that day I went to see him at his consulting room. He had a long cadaverous face with a prominent chin, and sleeked, black hair. He reminded me of an athletic schoolboy, and I could not see how a man whose interests were so obviously external could understand the minds of others. My impression of him was confirmed when

I noticed a photograph of a football team, and another of a racehorse, on the wall behind him. He asked me to sit beside him and then he waited, saying nothing. We sat like that for about ten minutes, and I felt it was a technique, which made people uncomfortable and obliged them to say something, but I said nothing. I was not uncomfortable, I was waiting for him to tell me what he wanted. Finally he said :

'Your wife has told me that she is afraid of you, nothing more, just that. Why do you think that is?'

'Because I do not approve of the things she likes.'

'What things?'

'She values money, success, approval, before people.'

'You mean before you?'

'No, before people, any people.'

'Do you mean she is good to you, but not to others?'

'No, I mean she loves me but I do not approve of her attitude to life.'

'And is her attitude to life of such concern to you?'

'It is, if I can see that she is wrong, that she harms herself and others.'

'What harm does she do?'

'She frightens herself, and offends the souls of certain other people.'

'Do you love her?'

'Yes.'

'Does she love you?'

'Yes.'

'What do you do, for a living?'

'Nothing.'

'Then how do you live—does she support you?'

I told him about my books, and the money I had received from Dachs.

'So you do not do anything, you are a writer—'

'No, I don't write any more.'

'Hm. I think you are trying to escape from the world of reality, the world of work.'

It was this which made me decide not to trust him, I identified him as an opponent, one who believed that life stemmed from work and not work from life.

'I do not believe in work,' I told him.

'You will have to pay me and the money will have come from work, without it you could not have come here —our relationship is made possible by money.'

'How much money?'

'Five guineas.'

I wrote a cheque.

'You are wrong,' I said, 'we have no relationship. Here is your money, and that is the extent of our contact. I have bought a few minutes of your time as I might buy a pair of shoes, except that they would have been more useful. We have made a commercial transaction, we have not had a human experience,' and I left.

It had been a waste of time. I was not escaping from reality, I was plunging ever deeper into it, but this man had not been able to see that because his own false view was confirmed by most people and confirmed them in turn. Work is not reality because man cannot be defined as the being who works, animals are capable of work if guided by a human intelligence, man is a creative being, and without freedom there is no creation; man is the being who chooses. And I had chosen to live as I felt like living, and he had chosen to believe in the reality of work. I did not think that his belief would make him ill but that it destroyed the basis of a human existence, but he seemed to think that my belief was a sickness, a symptom of delusion. I pitied people who believed that he could cure, for his cure would be for them to become efficient machines; he was a robber, a robber of souls.

When I arrived home, I found Maggie in tears.

'What is it?' I asked.

'Joseph, you do love me don't you?'

'You know it,' I replied.

'Then please, will you do something very important for me?'

'Anything I am able to do.'

'The doctor has telephoned, he told me of the interview, and—'

She was very frightened, she could not go on.

'Whatever did he say to frighten you so much?'

'If you love me, will you do as he wishes?'

'Why, what does he want me to do?' I asked.

'He wants you to—go into a hospital for a couple of weeks.'

'Whatever for?'

'He thinks they may be able to give you some treatment.'

'But I don't need it, I am well.'

'He thinks not—he thinks you are sick.'

'He means we have different religions.'

'What do you mean, Joseph, what has it got to do with religion?'

'Nothing, it was just a remark. Did he say anything else?'

'He said –you are afraid of life, that if anyone tries to make you face the realities you are inclined to panic, to hysteria. He said that if you do not do something about it, it will get worse—oh, Joseph, you know he is right. I have seen it happen. Please, for my sake if not for your own, take his advice!'

'I am not afraid of life,' I said, 'but of a living death—'

'There you are, Joseph, you say such exaggerated things, they frighten me. Unless you change, I cannot live with you.'

'Maggie, if I consent to this treatment, will you stay with me?'

'I—think so, Joseph, if you are better—'

'In what way—better?'

'More normal –more like other people—'

'Maggie, I cannot be what you call "normal", even for your sake, however much I love you, and I cannot have treatment for an illness I haven't got. We have failed, Maggie. If you will not live with me as I am, I shall leave –' and I went to my room, feeling more sorrowful than at any time since the death of my mother.

CHAPTER SIX

That evening Maggie went out, on her own. There was nowhere she wanted to go, it was only that she wished to get away from the house, for she could bear no more. She went to a restaurant and ordered a meal she did not want, just to be able to sit without being disturbed. If Joseph had decided to leave, she would not try to stop him, she had always suspected that his unpredictability might mean that he was ill, and now that was confirmed it was too frightening for her to live with him. She was impervious to her surroundings, she could not help thinking of Joseph and their life together. Something was troubling her very much, it was a picture forming in her mind of Joseph's relationships, a more objective picture than she had allowed herself to think of before. All the people with whom he had been

personally involved, his mother, the two adolescents Anna and Ted of whom he had told her, Tom, even Dachs, and the tramp yesterday, he had respected and loved, he valued them for themselves and also seemed to regard them as signposts on the way to himself, the self he wished to be. She suddenly realised that in every case, except that of Dachs, there had been mutual love or mutual respect, and even with Dachs he had tried until he could try no more to bring this about. She realised how extraordinary and extraordinarily consistent this was, and for the first time she glimpsed Joseph's world, not just the world he contained but which contained him: the world of his individual human connections, and she realised that, while he was certainly difficult, perhaps impossible, he was certainly not mad. It was like a revelation, hard to accept because it was like a vision in another faith, a faith she had previously rejected, but she was convinced, she saw what Joseph had striven for, to choose the human out of the seemingly all-powerful non-human, and she was obliged to acknowledge the rightness of the attempt no matter what the outcome, and she knew that she would never leave him, that when she had linked her fate with his by marrying him, this had in reality been a trust for her whole life. She could see, too, where he was wrong, that he had tried to make her see before she was ready for it, and how this had led to what had happened. She left the restaurant, and ran the whole way home, feeling that he might already have gone, and that if he had not she would stop him and tell him that she understood.

When she arrived, Sarah was still awake, waiting for her.

'Where's Joseph?' Maggie asked.

'Maggie, you are out of breath, sit down . . .'

'Is he upstairs?'

'No,' replied her mother. 'Something has happened—I've something to tell you.'

'What—what is it? Please tell me quickly!'

'After you went out, I was afraid to stay in the house, alone, with him. He had assaulted me, and I was afraid he might kill me. I overheard him tell you he would not have treatment, and I realised something must be done. I called the police—'

'The police! What did they do?'

'Nothing, really. They asked if I wanted to charge Joseph with assault, and I said not if he would do as the doctor advised and go to the hospital.'

'Well?'

'He made no objection, which I must say surprised me, and they took him there.'

'And he is there now?'

'Yes.'

'Where is it?'

'Here is the telephone number.'

'Sarah, we've both been intolerant fools—'

'How do you mean? The doctor said—'

'I also put my faith in a white coat and a medical degree, instead of my own heart and senses, but not any more! Oh, I hope I am not too late!'

She rang the number, and was told that Joseph had just arrived, that they wanted to keep him under observation for a while, and that he refused to speak to her.

'Do you intend to give him some awful treatment, or—certify him, or anything like that?'

'Oh, no,' the attendant at the other end of the line said. 'As far as we are concerned he is a voluntary patient and free to go when he likes, but he says he wants to stay here for a while, and he will not say anything else.'

'Do you want to see me?' Maggie asked.

'In a while we shall.'

'Thank you,' said Maggie.

'At least,' she said to Sarah, 'no harm is likely to come to him.'

'Nor will he be able to do harm to anyone else. I should hope that is the last you will see of him, I imagine he is there for good.'

'You imagine wrongly, Sarah, as always. I want you to leave, in the morning.'

'But why? You need me now—'

'No I don't. You are glad, aren't you, about this?'

'He assaulted me—'

'Just a little slap, Sarah.'

'Is that what you call it?'

'That is what it was, I saw it, and that is what I shall say it was.'

'What about his throwing you downstairs?'

'He did not throw me, I fell.'

'Do you want this madman to kill you?'

'Sarah, you have been married three times—why?'

'Really Maggie, it is none of your business. I picked the wrong men—'

'Three times?'

'Why not?'

'It could be something to do with you—'

'I could do no more for them than I did. Men are ungrateful—'

'I am your daughter, and I have never really had any illusions about you, only loyalty, and now I choose otherwise. You are selfish, and frivolous, and a snob—'

'Do not speak to your mother like that, Maggie!'

'I have to, your jealousy nearly wrecked my marriage, and almost destroyed my husband, but not quite. I am grateful to you for what you have given me, but I never really want to see you again—please leave tomorrow morning—and now go to bed.'

'Really, Maggie, I think he must have infected you with his illness—'

'Mother, don't say any more—go to bed.' And Sarah was obliged to go.

Maggie wrote Joseph a letter, telling him that although it had taken her a long time, perhaps too long, now she understood him, and if he still wanted her, that she wanted him to come back to her, for she loved him. She looked around at the room and wondered why she had ever valued luxury and possessions at all, she no longer cared about them, she cared about her life and Joseph's, and she wanted to learn from him how to love people and things in a human and realistic way. There are times when, suddenly, our sense of perspective changes, we see everything in such a manner that what before seemed large is reduced, and what before seemed insignificant is important. For some reason she remembered that Charlie had said: 'Women don't like tramps'. Why not? she wondered. Was it because women tended to value men for what they could give them, as men tended to value women as sexual objects? Perhaps there was a degree of inevitability in this, but only because people wished to identify with their own sex. And if she thought of herself only as a human being who happened to be female, and not primarily as a woman, what then? She realised well enough that Charlie was gentle, and understanding, and unassertive, and that these were qualities she liked. Really, she liked Charlie, not a woman liking a tramp but a person liking a person. And how wonderful, she felt released from this judging and assessing, she was released from the sexual fallacy of needing all men to suit her because she knew she

had what she wanted, herself and Joseph, and she no longer needed him to be perfect because she could trust herself to be human. She felt as though she could see, stretched out before her, their entire future life, the unknown which becomes known by trusting the life that wells within and is abundant without—she was whole!

'My darling Joseph,' she whispered, 'sleep well tonight—we are saved!'

* * *

When I understood what was happening, that I should have to go either to the police station or the hospital, I asked instinctively for Maggie, but she was not to be found, and for a moment I thought of running away, but I realised that it would be purposeless. I was not mad, and the slap I gave Sarah did not merit prosecution, but in the predicament I was in I felt it best to allow myself to be taken to the hospital The fault really lay with Maggie's and Sarah's belief in authority, that they should have believed that the doctor's assessment of me carried an authoritative weight, or should have wished to believe it, whereas a doctor is not a man especially equipped to understand and cure illnesses but a human being whose smattering of knowledge can help if he cares for people, and can hinder if he does not. I knew they could not force me to have treatment, nor even to stay in the hospital, and Sarah really only wanted to be sure that I parted from Maggie. If I left the hospital in a few days, and did not go back to the house, Sarah was not likely to prefer charges and I should be free to do as I pleased. But the thought of Maggie tormented me more than my present predicament. I loved her, but she had lost faith in me. Although she had said she might be willing to live with me again if I went to the hospital, she believed I was ill when I knew I was not, and without understanding there could be no relationship. For the first time I felt it was useless, a waste, to try to convince those who did not understand, of what I could see was the truth, but it made life seem desperate. Sitting in the car which took me to the hospital I felt isolated, abandoned. We are inevitably alone and that does not necessarily separate us from others, it distinguishes us and perhaps makes us more identifiable, but lack of caring plunges us into an icy solitude because it denies our solidarity with the race. There are great spaces around us, which constitute heaven when they are filled with reci-

procal human feeling, purgatory when one receives no response, and hell when feeling is absent. The monstrous pile of the hospital building, just visible by the light of the lamps, the tiled corridors, the restless patients muttering in their sleep in the ward, the total lack of privacy, thrust me into hell for a time, for I could feel nothing, nothing but the coldness of infinite space around me, devoid of any familiar relationship to fill the limitless distance, the human which humanises all. I tried to feel pity for the people around me but I could not. I did not believe that anyone could be healed in a place such as this—impersonal, ugly, indifferent—and perhaps they really needed help, but all I could experience was a total absence, a death, which obliterated even fear.

I was glad to get into bed, a strange, impersonal, cold bed, and I lay without sleeping. Now and then someone groaned or cried out, and the footsteps of a nurse as he went about his duties, the icy draught which blew through the room as he opened the door, the stuffiness when the door was closed, the aloneness of the sleeping bodies of my unknown companions, tore at my heart with a sadness which made me long for a mother, not my own mother, the mother of my flesh, but a mother to give me a warmth such as I had never known. I had told the nurse that, if Maggie called or came to see me, I did not want to speak to her. What I needed now she could not give me, and I felt that I had nothing to give her. I decided that however painful it was I had to try to forget her, our relationship did not work.

It seemed to me then, as I lay watching the night sky through the window, that we were all cold, dead, that we had all died, although we thought ourselves alive we were all corpses. If our choices were ineffective, if our attempts to open the door from isolation and indifference to a wider human connection were fruitless, we *were* dead, for we were no more able to live than if we were in our graves, and were a greater burden on the earth. There is a presence and there is an absence, neither of which are dependent on time or space. The absolute presence I had felt, at some time, with all the people I had loved, the absence was misunderstanding, carelessness, hate, or merely the rejection of the will of love. I knew what I wanted, to evoke the human in every approach to the other, in every confrontation with the person of man in the guise of an individual member of the race, but we all hid in our hearts our specific fear that

asserting his fullness, and I could feel that in this place those fears were uppermost in the minds of those called sick and that this meant I was in a world of somnambulists, of people who walked in a sleep of fear.

In the morning, after a meagre breakfast of a boiled egg, and bread with margarine, which did not savour of food but of the need to fill the stomach, I was told to have a bath in a bathroom without a door I could not avoid the stealthy, covert glances of some of the others, mostly older men, at my body, which brought back memories of the past, painfully because of the difference between my memories of love and the sight of these guilty faces, forever forbidden an open fulfillment of their desires, and while I had chosen the woman, the desire of the man for the man is legitimate for the human soul, even if in our world it is not allowed to the personality.

After washing, we were ordered to sit about and talk, or play draughts or billiards, until lunchtime. I sat and watched the other men. Only a few were able to take part in any activity, mostly they sat, inert, de-energised, lost in some inner anxiety, their cruel and tormenting inner worlds which never ceased to hurt them. Then I was told by the male nurse, a tall, harsh-looking man with iron grey hair and the manner of a sergeant-major, which perhaps he had once been, that I must see the doctor. That nurse was the real ruler of the ward—the doctor, as I discovered, almost never appeared—and he did his job in the manner of a disciplinarian. He ordered the patients about like prisoners, bullying them and shouting at them, but he was a hypocrite for, in front of the doctors and relatives he would smile, speak kindly, and when a patient left, happy beyond words to be going yet afraid of what he would find outside, he would shake the man's hand and say :

'All the best, and remember what I told yer, I don't want ter see you back 'ere, ever !'

'You won't' the patient would say, but his heart qualied inside of him at the thought of the battles he would have to fight with himself, and win, in order to keep clear of this place.

I saw the doctor in a tiny office in the ward. He was a thick-set, insensitive looking man of middle years, with sharp eyes, a square face, and a scar across his cheek which gave him a criminal, almost brutal appearance. His com-

plexion was a curious yellow colour, and I judged him to be of oriental origin. I sat opposite him for several minutes while he read some papers, and then he asked:

'Why did you assault your mother-in-law?'

I did not wish to speak to him, for I knew he would not understand, but I was obliged to say something. I decided to tell the truth.

'I don't think there is any use in explaining, because I do not think you will understand me. But if you insist I shall tell you—'

'I don't insist,' he replied, calmly, without any feeling. 'Do you feel very misunderstood?'

'It isn't that, it is that I feel *you* will not understand.'

'You don't like me?' His mouth smiled, but not his eyes. 'Are you colour prejudiced?'

'No,' I said.

He shrugged his shoulders.

'And does your mother-in law misunderstand you?'

I told him what had happened, why I had smacked Sarah's face.

'And are you "queer", homosexual?'

'I have been, but I do not think it is wrong.'

'What about your wife: do you have normal relations with her?'

'We were very happy sexually.'

'You're bisexual then?'

'I have had both men and women lovers,' I replied.

'Do you masturbate?'

'I have,' I told him, 'but I stopped myself.'

'Why?'

'Because I do not choose to be homosexual or to masturbate.'

'Have you ever assaulted your wife?'

'I pushed her downstairs—'

'Was she hurt?'

'No.'

'Why did you do it?'

While he asked these questions, and listened to my answers, the expression in the man's hard eyes did not change. It seemed to say that he had experienced many of the mad, and the wicked, that they were a different breed to himself who needed to be kept in control by people like him, to be rendered harmless by his methods and his treatment. This distancing of me from himself, which he may

have thought to be his job, his professional function, was really an aspect of absence, of indifference. It is hurtful because, as I realised at that moment, it is not true, there is no necessary difference between any people, the sane and the mad are not different, 'madness' is merely the name given to the absence of understanding between them.

I told him what happened when Maggie was angry with me over my comment on her painting, and that I had never been quite sure what had occurred.

'You mean you had some kind of mental blackout, in which you hurt her?'

'No, I mean that I am not clear whether I actually pushed her or she fell, that is all.'

He considered for a few moments.

'We'll give you shock treatment, insulin shock, which is more powerful than electric—'

'I am not ill—'

'Why are you here?'

'I had the alternative of coming here or being placed on a charge of assault—I thought –'

'Quite. I think you need treatment.'

'And if I will not have it?'

'Then you can leave. But you'll be back.'

'May I return to the ward now?' I asked. I had taken a great dislike to this man, whom I felt to be monstrous.

'Certainly. You know, I can help even those who don't like me.'

'But not me,' I replied, and left him.

It might be true that he could help people who did not like him, presuming he could help anyone at all, but it was not true that he could help people whom he did not like, and he did not like his patients, or those of his patients who, like myself, questioned his judgement. He was a doctor, which is an academic qualification, a professional competence and a social authority, but illness cannot be cured without love, which is any man's prerogative, and he did not love, he was cold, frigid. When I left his office, an old, bent man, one of the patients, said to me :

'What's 'e givin' yer, mate—shock treatment?'

'He wants to.'

'Yus, gives it ter everyone, 'e do. Ins'lin, or 'lectric?'

'Insulin.'

'It's degradin'.'

'How?' I asked.

'They straps yer dahn, an' yer shaht an' swear an' say a load of old filth—but yer don't know yer doin' it –'

'Horrible! Is anyone helped by it?'

'Some people feel better, for a time. A lot 'as ter come back an' 'ave it over agin, though.'

'What are you here for?' I asked him.

'Ain't got no 'ome, no-one ter look after me. Too old ter manage by meself—I'm better orf in 'ere.'

'Won't they take you in an old people's home?'

'I don't want 'er go in an 'ome fer good – get the institooshun mentality. I 'as a bit er 'electric shock, don't do no good nor 'arm, turns yer brain up a bit—then I comes aht, see? I come back when I'm fed up on me own.'

It seemed to me that this old man had courage, the price of his freedom and perhaps of staying alive was to have his brain 'turned up a bit' every now and then, and he could pay it, but I couldn't stop the tears from coming to my eyes, his words were so sad, inexpressibly so.

'What's er matter, mate, don't yer feel good?'

'I'm all right,' I said, and turned away so that he shouldn't see me cry.

I longed, as I had longed when my mother died, for just one friend, one person who understood. That afternoon I received a letter, in Maggie's writing. Unless she changed, we could not go back together, and I didn't want to read what she had to say, it would be too painful. I put it in my pocket, to read later or to throw away if I felt like it. Then I remembered Tom, that he had said he would help if he could. I wrote and told him what had happened, and asked him to come to see me, as soon as he was able.

The following day I had to spend together with a few other people, at work-therapy, making baskets, painting, modelling in clay. The 'class' was taken by a gentle, nervous, patient young woman, with red hair, whose eyelids continually blinked. Useless work is not therapeutic, it merely keeps the body occupied, and all work is useless to the person who does it except that which he needs to do to stay alive or that which he does spontaneously, from love, but I saw what function it was supposed to perform here. I was much more interested in the people than the work, although I did make a basket. One young man, about my age, tall strong, his shirt sleeves turned to the elbows, revealing powerful forearms tatooed all over with strange symbols and devices, who had perhaps been a sailor, stood

how I had looked out of the window when I had been writing my book, that perhaps he too could not concentrate and longed to escape, until I caught a glimpse of his face. He was not really looking at anything, his eyes were blank, he was withdrawn, completely hidden inside himself. I thought that something must have hurt him, forced him to hide away from the world, and there had been nowhere to hide save in his own being. He was not there with us, and I could see that, for him, the idea of the therapy was to make him use his hands in order to draw him out of himself, to bring him back, at least mechanically. But our souls do not follow our hands, it is the other way around. What had made him withdraw must have been some denial of love, unless it had been a shock, but he did not seem shocked, and only love could discover him again. There is only one reason why we can be lost. The universal law is love, and the denial of that love means that we drift in the universe like dust, we have no meaning. These men, my companions in misery, were waiting in the twilight of absence for man, become strange to himself and his brother, to find himself again.

CHAPTER SEVEN

That night it was impossible to sleep, because one of the patients cried continually. The sound he made — 'ah, ah', — seemed like a heartrending plea to someone not to kill him. Such cries, like the crying of children when they cannot have what they want, correspond to deprivations in us all. I, too, could have cried out to mankind to let me live, for without love we must all fail, and die, and this poor man's torment almost broke my self-control, for I did not feel there was help to be got here for him or anyone else. These mechanics of the soul tinkered with men as they might with machines, but there is a qualitive difference between the human and the mechanical. Even the cleverest of machines can only give out what is put into it by man, it is man who has the free volition, and having freedom, he knows what he needs, but deprived of his needs he may become helpless, dependent on others to give him what he cannot obtain by himself. The attempt to 'cure' by mechanical means is an attempt to eliminate pain, and pain does not exist in the

abstract, like every other phenomenon it has a cause, and the main cause of mental suffering is neglect. Here, there seemed to be no real care, merely an attempt to keep order, and order was precisely what most of these men had had too much of. They were the casualties of a society which cannot define madness because, itself insane but continuing to function, it can only identify as mad those who are alien to itself and non-functioning: who, like the drunkard Marmeladov in Dostoievsky's 'Crime and Punishment', punish themselves for their all-too-human weaknesses, like these men around me. These patients, manifesting desperate needs or tragic guilt, *had* to be kept in control, in view of the authorities, for the hygiene of the state. One great lesson I had learned was that love, any kind of love, is not hygienic, our spontaneous feelings and desires do not manifest themselves in tidy and antiseptic ways, we are nearer to the animal than to the sterile automaton. I did not intend to lead an existence which was sterile in any sense, either of emotion or infection. I would infect everyone with what I felt to be the truth, no matter what, and if I could convince sufficient numbers we would find a way together to a truly human life!

Later that morning, when a group of men were sitting together after breakfast, I got up and began to talk to them.

'Don't have their shock treatment or their drugs, there is nothing wrong with you that love and understanding cannot cure! It is this inhuman way of treating people which is mad, not us. We're not machines, we are men, and we must prove it!'

One man, who always kept his hand to his forehead, said:

'That's all very well, but what about these pains in me 'ead. I just wanner get rid of these pains.'

Out of the corner of my eye I saw the nurse walk rapidly up to me. He shook me roughly by the shoulder.

'What do yer think you're up to? If you don't like it 'ere, you can leave, but we can soon arrange it so yer *can't* leave —get me?'

I will not be man-handled, and I might have hit the nurse, perhaps with disastrous consequences, when a fairly young man dressed in a brown suit, whom I had not seen before, came up to us and said:

'It's all right nurse, I was just coming to see Mr Ashley.'

manner.

'That's it, Mr Jones,' he smiled, 'you 'ave a word with 'im. He's bored, I expect, not a bad chap.' And he smiled at me and walked away.

The man, the most marked feature of whose face was the very intense way he looked at one, offered me his hand.

'My name is Jones, as you have gathered. Come with me, please.'

I followed him to a room along a passageway, some distance from the ward.

'I'm not quite ready to see you yet,' he said. 'Actually, for the moment, I just wanted to get you away from the nurse. If you wouldn't mind sitting here for a while, I'll be back.' And he left me there.

Obviously, this man was one of the medical staff, the only hospital official I had seen whom I liked, and he might have saved me from a great deal of trouble. After this incident I felt very discouraged. I could not solve the problem of the pains the patients had or were convinced they had, and if they were convinced the treatment would cure them, it might seem to do so, in some cases might actually do so, and then the doctors would be confirmed in their methods. It was not that I was againt any kind of help, but this kind of treatment merely supresses the difficulty, in the long run only the truth really helps, self-delusion just allays the trouble. What was needed was a change of heart in people towards themselves and others. Whoever did not acknowledge himself to be my brother, I would try to open his eyes, to show him that I who stood before him was indeed his brother and not his enemy.

After a time, Jones returned.

'Now we can talk,' he said, and sat.

'Thank you,' I said to him, 'you were just in time, the nurse is very unpleasant and hypocritical and I don't like him.'

'I can understand that,' he said, 'he is rather old-fashioned.'

It struck me that this man was honest and that he trusted me, and I felt grateful to him.

'Are you a doctor?' I asked.

'A psychotherapist.'

'You talk to people?'

'Yes, or they talk to me.'

'I've talked to someone before, but it was useless—'

'With whom? Tell me—'

I told him about Maggie, and Charlie, and what had happened with the doctor I had gone to see.

'So Maggie forced you to see him?'

'Yes, I suppose so,' I replied.

'And you were more or less forced to come here?'

'Yes—and I think it is a waste of time for me to have treatment—I am not ill—'

'No—and you can go if you wish.'

'I would like to talk to you.'

'What about?'

'What about those men out there? And that disgusting treatment—shocks, drugs, one man even had an operation on his brain—'

'What for?'

'He was depressed.'

'They are not *my* methods, but there are all kinds of methods.'

'And what are you going to do about it?'

'Nothing—those men are free to choose whether or not they will have treatment—if they were not, it would be because they are a danger to themselves and others and then something would have to be done.'

'Then they should be taught to choose what is beneficial.'

'Teaching might be your job,' he smiled, 'after all, you are the writer—'

'Have you read my book?'

'Yes, and I like it, but there is a good deal of hostility in it.'

'I am not hostile.'

'What do you feel about the nurse?'

'I don't like him—why?'

'And the doctor you saw yesterday?'

'I certainly do not like him.'

'And your mother-in-law?'

'I've tried, but I don't like her either.'

'And you say you are not hostile?'

'I am sure there are three people *you* don't like. In any case, it is they who are hostile, or rather, they are against people—'

'In what way?'

'They do not love people.'

'I could if they were different.'

'You want to change them?'

'Yes.'

'Do you feel they are opposed to you?'

'Yes, yes they are!'

'Do you want to know what I think?'

'What?'

'That you cannot bear opposition.'

'What do you mean?'

'The people you don't like have opposing ideas to yourself. You want to change those ideas, and the fact that they are oppositional compels you to try to change them because you are afraid of opposition—'

'But what about Maggie?' I asked. 'I *know* she is wrong!'

'Perhaps. You are trying to change her and she is trying to change you. When you try to change her she is forced to change you, so that you become someone who is not forcing her—and so on.'

'Is this what you call psychology?' I asked.

'One tries to understand—'

'I don't agree with it, I am not afraid of opposition, I have to resist those who would prevent me from changing and growing—'

'You may be right, but you are afraid they can stop you.'

'They *can* stop me!'

'Only if you are afraid—'

'If they don't love, I have to resist them, for if we don't love one another, we'll die—'

'You can't force anyone to love.'

That remark immediately brought Dachs to mind, and I asked:

'And what do you think of homosexuality?'

'Homosexuality? It is not an illness, and at the present time it has the added attraction of the illegal, which for some people is a powerful incentive—'

'Yes,' I agreed, 'at least you are not intolerant. Let us agree on what can be agreed, that perhaps I *am* trying to make people understand love, but I choose to do so because I can see it is absolutely imperative, and not because I am afraid of what will happen to me if I do not.'

'And now we must finish,' he said. 'If you would like to see me again, ask the nurse' And we shook hands.

Maggie and she had become afraid of me, and this had given urgency to my attempts to change her. I wanted to save her, and we loved each other and were very different from each other. But what did that matter now, it was finished, I no longer had a love of my own. And then, in the night, for the first time I let go of the idea of love, I saw things as they are, without wanting to change them, and I was filled with a compassion and pain for all the immense sufferings of mankind, and a kind of calm, for I knew that while I was responsible, each man is only responsible for a little, the burden of love is shared just as the responsibility for suffering is shared. Some men, like Jones, attempt to carry their portion of it, doing what they can even if they are in error, which to an extent they are bound to be. Others, like the doctor, do their duty, and thus merely keep the existing wheels turning, however bad or good. Still others, like the nurse, are oppressive in their methods and hurt where possibly they do not intend to hurt, perhaps out of ignorance.

The weight of pain which I felt I must carry forever along the slow uphill path of the betterment of life seemed immense, but the peace, even joy, of realisation that in this task many were my helpers, in their unique ways, and I was the helper of many others, was also very great, and in the acknowledgement of a great joy and a great suffering I felt I had found the completeness, the wholeness of being, for which I had sought from the beginning. One can find it in an instant, through love, as I had found it through Maggie, but if it is not allied to knowledge one will inevitably lose it again, for one will fail to understand the way life is, and become angry, or afraid, or tormented, and lose one's vision of the light.

'Blessed is life,' I said to myself. 'Blessed is life which gives and takes away. Bless my mother and father who gave me birth, and Sarah who made me suffer.'

And I knew that I had grasped hold, not merely of *my* life, but of life itself.

In the morning, I had a visitor, it was Tom. He looked even more handsome than when I had seen him last.

'I came as soon as I got your letter,' he said.

'Thank you Tom, I knew you would. But what about the play?'

'Oh, it closed last week. Not a bad part, but I'm tired of the theatre. What about you, what are you doing here?

were over.'

I told him my story, and when I had finished, he said :

'I always thought that, if I were you, lovely though she is I would divorce Maggie, for fear of something happening, like this.'

'I'm not ill,' I said, 'and I've had no treatment, but because of this experience I understand a lot more than I did. *You* just live, I admire you for it, but I realise now that I always have to have a purpose for what I do, or find the purpose afterwards—the seekers after truth often spend their lives seeking, whereas some people live the truth, like children, or birds—'

'You think I live truth?' he asked.

'You are truth to yourself you live your own life.'

'Joseph,' he said, 'I hoped I would find you like this—perfectly well and able to leave—for a selfish reason. I've never had a home, and I'm tired of wandering from place to place There's a little house I've found, near the sea, we could rent it for almost nothing. Would you care to share it with me, for a while at least, until you've decided what to do?'

From the moment Tom walked into the ward, like a blade of sunlight, my longing for him had returned. What he had just suggested was like something I might have dreamed, but it made me indescribably sad, because I knew, as I had known when he was Maggie's lover, that he was not for me, that we would not have a sexual relationship because, although people must constantly re-make their choices, and although I had lost Maggie, I had chosen her and I still loved her whether she loved me or not, and while I loved her I could not also love Tom.

'It would be wonderful, Tom,' I said, 'but I must refuse.'

'Why? Is it Maggie—do you still want Maggie?'

'Yes.'

'Then stay until you know whether you're going back together.'

'We may never go back together—'

'You mean you are prepared to live alone for the rest of your life, and dream of her?'

'No. Tom, what do you think will happen if we do this?'

'Happen? You can write, I'll swim and sunbathe and have a home of my own to do as I please in—'

with me, as I must have done with Ted before we made love. He knew that something must happen, he desired it, but he would not face what he knew. He just wanted to be alone with me. Women are sometimes like that before they have ever made love, they are drawn to someone, half blindly, half knowing, and yet not wanting to know.

'Tom,' I said, 'I'll come, but for a limited time, and if we do not get on, I shall leave—'

'Wonderful!' he said.

He called for me at the hospital the following day. I wrote a note to Jones, thanking him for his help and telling him I had learned from him and that I thought I should now be able to manage my life.

The cottage was on the south coast, not very far from London, a little whitewashed house in a tiny overgrown garden, on a hill overlooking the sea. The isolation, the silence, the lush green of trees and plants delighted me, and could I have lived as Tom lived, from moment to moment, I would have been idyllically happy, except that I was falling in love with him. He was as excited as a bride at having his own house, and once we were comfortable he spent his days on the beach, or if the weather was warm enough, in the garden dressed only in his bathing slip.

Loving two people at once is, if one wishes to be whole, a torment. The sight of Tom's brilliant, tender nudity, his hair like tow blown over his face, his childlike, happy smile which seemed to conceal a growing manliness, made me feel that what I had conceived of as my life was slipping away, that my struggles, my beliefs, my sorrows, had been mere substitutes for the joyous sensual beauty which was Tom. Maggie was my real life. But she had become a dream, she had faded as a dream fades on waking. But Tom, whom I knew represented a fantasy of pure sensual indulgence, seemed the only reality. Once, in the night, I even got out of bed to go to him. What harm would it do. Who will ever know? I thought, and what great ecstasy it will be! But instead of going to him I sat down and wrote a letter to Maggie, telling her where I was in case she should worry, and that Tom and I were enjoying a holiday together, at least for a week or two. I told myself I was writing because she had a right to know where I was even if she did not want me, but really it was a plea, for her to save me from my desire for Tom, for I had chosen her, for ever.

ing Maggie and not having her, the feeling of being a spectator of my own life because I was not doing anything with my life, put me in an unbearable situation. In order to be able to live with myself I started to write I began for no reason except to pass the time, but within an hour or two it became a serious activity once more, purposeful, life-giving. Tom was overjoyed to see me begin to work again, and he kept out of the house as much as possible, and moved silently when he was in.

It was a day or two later that I received Maggie's letter. She began by saying that she was more happy than I could know that I was out of the hospital, but that she had some painful and distressing news When I had refused to see her, and had not replied to her letter, not knowing what to do she had gone to see Dachs, for she knew that he would not want me to be incarcerated and might use his great ingenuity to help me, at least to make sure that the hospital authorities realised I was not ill. He looked many years older, and when she told him what had happened, he put his hands over his face and sobbed. Then she heard him say one word, my name, Joseph, before he collapsed into unconsciousness. She had called a doctor at once, but he had not recovered since and was expected to remain unconscious for an indefinite period, and then to die. She said she was very sorry to have to give such news, and that she did not think there would be any purpose in my going to see him now. Then she added that, in regard to us, she now understood me, and if I preferred Tom to her, so be it. She felt responsible for all that had happened, although she knew she had only been instrumental, an instrument in my progress from Dachs to Tom. She realised that she had little to offer me, but she would wait and if eventually I decided that, after all, I loved her as she loved me, she would come to me. What had hurt her most, she wrote, was that I had entirely ignored her letter, although she could understand how I must feel about her now, after the way she had behaved She signed herself : 'Your contrite and loving wife'.

Dachs, the indestructible, the omnipotent the invincible, was dying, perhaps already dead ! I felt that it was my fault, I had maintained that he did not love me, had tried to change his feelings to love of me, but perhaps he really had loved me after all, in his manner. I had wanted him to be a different person, a better person, I had judged him and

found him lacking, yet, in the end, he had not done me harm. Many people would be glad to be rid of him, and by dying he had solved the problem I had hitherto found unsolvable – that of his existence, yet now I could have begun to find a solution by living in the world after my own fashion, he was gone. Images of him and his relation with me flashed through my mind. I remembered the boy I had been when I met him. I remembered the first time we made love, how he had awed and almost terrified me. I remembered the person I became through his tutelage, my inner resistance to him and then – Maggie. That vital, hypnotising presence, that potent body, were no more! What I felt then must have been akin to what is felt by members of a primitive tribe when their wizard or witchdoctor unexpectedly dies, that the one who seemed to have power over the forces of life themselves had himself succumbed to death. But he was no more really omnipotent than any man is. He had successfully convinced others, perhaps even himself, that he was, and that had been his undoing, for he could no more exist without love than any other human beings can. I had not loved him. I had insisted that he change before I could love him and he had not changed. All human beings, the good and the bad, the strong and the weak, are entitled to their existences, if they try to deprive us of ours we must resist them, as gently and forcefully as possible, and they must resist us if we try to deprive them of their right to live. I still do not believe in rights, but I understood now that love gives everything its due, and there is only love, or death.

Tom found me in tears, and I showed him the letter.

'Poor Dachs, and poor Maggie,' was all he said.

'What is the letter she refers to, that she sent to you?' he asked.

I had forgotten it, but I still had it, unopened, in my pocket. I read it, then handed it to Tom.

'It seems we've both misjudged her,' he said. 'And she thinks—we're lovers.'

'I – wanted us to be. Tom– –and I didn't,' I said.

'I didn't really think about it,' he confessed, 'but I suppose it *was* a possibility.'

I felt torn and wretched.

'I'm in love with her—and with you, Tom,' I couldn't help saying, 'but I've chosen her. It's misery –'

'I know,' he answered. 'If you want, I'll sleep with you, and no-one need ever find out.'

That was the most moving personal remark anyone has ever made to me.

'I think you know how much I would like to, Tom, but I'm afraid that if we do, I may never find my way back to her—and I want to.'

'Yes, I know,' he replied, and left me.

That night I dreamed that Dachs was my father. He said to me: 'Here is your inheritance, no doubt you will spend it in ways I despise, but it is yours all the same.' And he gave Tom to me, and then died. But Tom shook his head and smiled, and pointed to a place by my side. I looked and saw Maggie, sitting on the ground crying. I picked her up, and she laughed, and Tom had vanished.

I had not thought of my father for many years, I did not know even if he was alive or dead. Dachs had, in some ways, been a father to me, but the inheritance, however desirable, was not a blessing—but Maggie, Maggie!

In the morning I usually heard Tom about, for he was an early riser, but this morning the house seemed empty, and when I went to look, I found a note from him, saying:

'Domestication isn't really in my line, good luck.' He was gone; it was the act of a true friend.

I wrote a letter to Maggie, telling her that Tom had left, that we had never been lovers, that I was writing again, and that, if she could bear the difficulties, I was longing to see her, for I loved her.

She arrived the next day, soft and gentle and open, her brittle sophistication fallen away, and she said:

'What a beautiful place, and how I love you! We'll never part again.'

I had found my Maggie.

She no longer gets unhappy when I write, but sometimes she is still afraid. I am writing about my experience at the hospital, but now I can as easily not write as write. When Maggie needs me, I abandon what I am doing and go to her, for upon love, life is founded.

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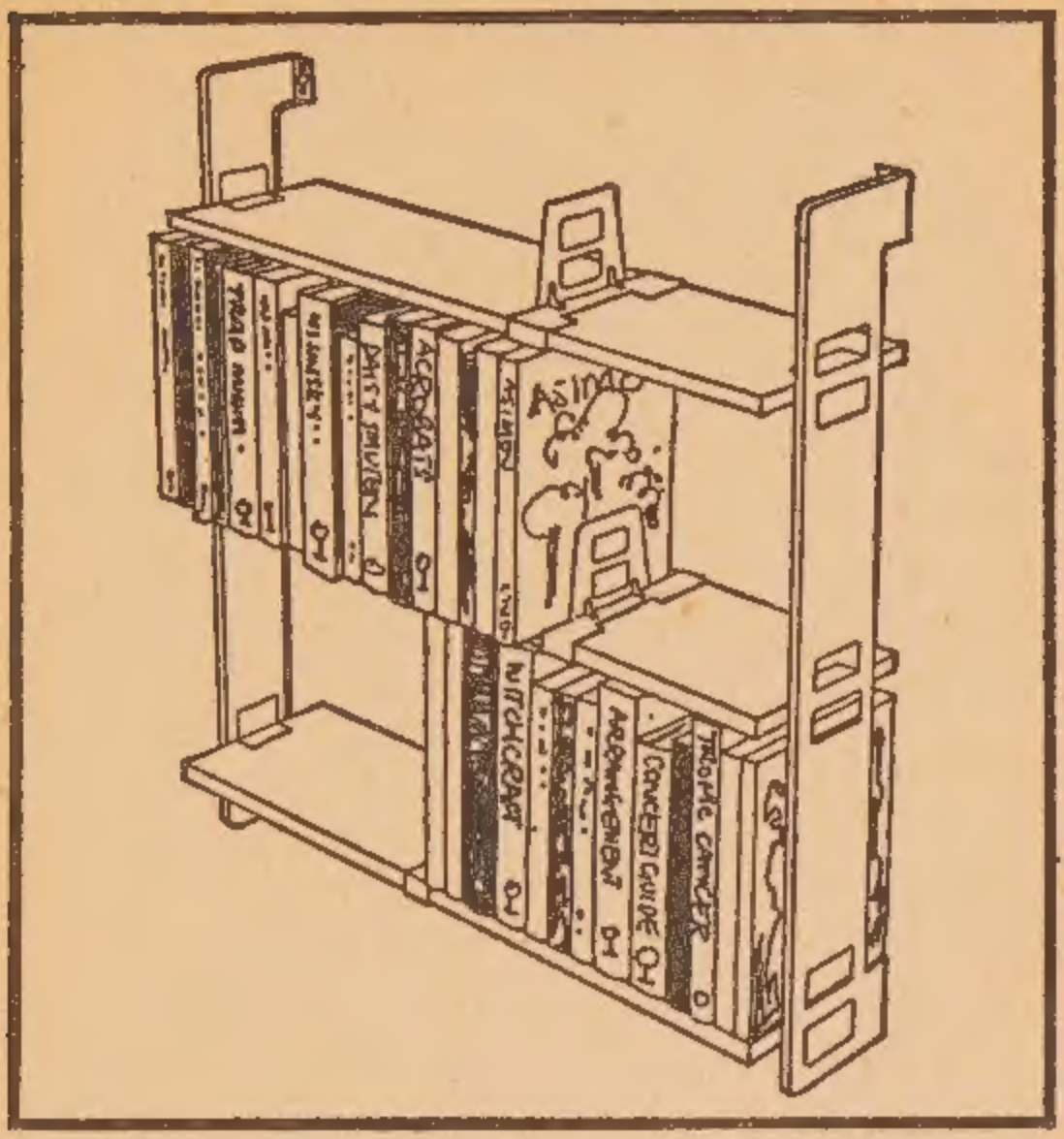

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